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ブラック・アラベスク
鋼殻のレギオス 12

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CHROME SHELLLED REGIOS

12 ブラック・アラベスク

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ファンタジア文庫

ファンタジア文庫

ISBN978-4-8291-3382-8

C0193 ¥580E

定価：本体580円(税別)

富士見書房

鋼殻のレギオス12

ブラック・アラベスク

「地獄が始まるわよ」

天剣を従えた女王は歌うような声でそう宣言する。

ニーナの中に存在する廃貴族を狙うサヴァリスと、それを阻止せんとするレイフォン。背後からは、女王アルシェイラ率いる槍殻都市グレンダンが迫る。同じ頃ツエルニでは、フェリが一人レイフォンのサポートを続ける中、リーリンの身に異変が——。そして、空からは無数の汚染獣が出現する。

逃げ場をなくしたツエルニで、やがて目覚める漆黒の少女と、明らかに^{ガーディアン}守護獣計画。

絶体絶命のツエルニをレイフォンは守れるのか——！

Novel Illustrations

「戦^{いくさ}よ！」

鋼殻のレギオス

CHROME SHELLLED REGIOS

12 ブラック・アラベスク



少女が目を開いた。

「目覚めた。まさか……」



Prologue

The sound of metal sliding against each other sounded from the bike and from the wheel. The engine had entered a danger zone.

But he did not relax his foot on the accelerator that had reached its limit.

"Gu....."

A stone hit the helmet protecting his vision. The screen of dust obstructed his sight. Layfon's vision remained clear thanks to Felli's flake and the vision-aid system.

Similarly, another bike was running at full speed in front of Layfon. Though the sound was a bit far, the sudden increase in volume was enough to add more pressure and impatience to Layfon.

He looked at the rear mirror. The shadow of a huge city was reflected in the mirror that was coated with a screen of dust. It was a shape Layfon had seen before. It had multi-legs that differed from Zuellni's.

Grendan.

He found it impossible. He didn't want to believe it, but thinking back on the previous battle and how that filth monster died..... Only one Military Artist could execute that feat in Layfon's mind.

The Queen, Alsheyra Almonise.

She could do it. She who far exceeded all Heaven's Blade successors..... But for Grendan which was unrelated to the Queen's consciousness, why did it keep chasing this side?

"Damn!"

He must hurry. Savaris was on the bike before him, planning to capture the Haikizoku, and the Haikizoku was inside Nina. Nina said so herself. What would

Savaris do to her? Had he the skill to extract the Haikizoku from her? If so, why did he wait till now?

Or was he waiting for the city to sink into a crisis?

Layfon heard that a Haikizoku was born from a city's hatred and stubbornness. At that time, the Haikizoku answered Dinn's intense wish to protect the city. It did not originate from Dinn. It was lurking inside Zuellni and was called forth by Dinn's will. And now this thing was inside Nina. Right now, the city was in a crisis. Changes might have come to Nina's body.

"Felli..... The Captain. Is she OK?"

"..... I'm concentrating on supporting you. I don't quite know the situation of the city."

"....."

Is that true or false? But even though the anger rose in Layfon, he could not just quietly push it down. Even if he knew of Nina's situation, he could do nothing. He should concentrate on solving the problem before him rather than being swayed by his concern of the city. Hesitation remained in him though his heart had made such a decision.

Nina had guaranteed him when he left Zuellni that she'd protect Leerin. He was truly happy, so happy that his sadness due to what she said before, "I can't support you", had disappeared.

"I won't let you!"

The bike began to jump. The ground in front of him split apart like a slope, the structure of the earth exposed to the air. Having regained his balance, Layfon stood on the bike. The Shim Adamantium Dite in his left hand cut through the sky.

External Burst type Kei variation – Sendan. (The cut of a lightning flash)

Savaris was also dancing in the sky as he released the suppressed Kei. A straight-line strike similarly split the ephemeral air asunder.

Savaris' figure was gone from the bike.

The presence appeared above Layfon.

Savaris descended speedily in a spiral.

"Tsk - !"

Block it.... Ah, no. Layfon chose to evade. He quickly released external Kei and used its remnants to change the bike's direction.

Savaris landed. The Kei in his knee was released and pieces of rocks flew everywhere. If Layfon had received that attack, he and his bike might have gotten caught in the explosion and turned into scrap metal.

"Hahaha! This isn't my style but it's quite interesting!"

As Layfon had lost his balance in the Kei remnants, he couldn't immediately counterattack.

"Are we to play wherever we are?"

Savaris' laughter pierced through the smoke screen made by the explosion. Layfon, putting Kei in his voice, blew away the dust.

And saw Savaris was already back on his bike and was ahead of him by some distance.

"Tsk!"

Layfon also landed with the bike and madly chased after him.

If the Sapphire Dite and the Adamantium Dite weren't damaged, he could use the Steel Threads..... but all he had left was the Shim Adamantium Dite.

The sound of the city was closing in behind him.

Since he was still chasing after Savaris, Layfon could only push back the roiling despair in his heart.

What could Layfon do if it was just Savaris.....

But what about the city behind him?

Chapter 1: Chaotic City

A very beautiful girl had appeared, wearing a dark dress. Her clear eyes were looking his way with a thoughtful expression. Her pose was elegant and lovely like a doll's. Her delicately long fingers held a black bestial mask. Green light ran slowly along the lines of the mask, stirring, suddenly bright and suddenly dim. A feeling that "this is a creature" exuded from it.

Dixerio stood before the girl. He also wore a mask, but his mask differed from the Wolf Faces'. This was the Haikizoku – The Electronic Fairy of a destroyed city had turned into the form of a mask. It conquered his fate. It was the power of a curse.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

She didn't answer.

Her figure lightly shook. Her dangerous beauty attempted to sway his will, making him unable to distinguish what was imagination and what was real. The girl was using some unbelievable power. This girl was the result of a complex combination of genes. This miraculous girl fascinated him.

Dixerio Maskane was confused.

"Saya, didn't you die?"

He confirmed her existence, yet he was not impatient or anxious.

Since his home city – The City of Strong Desire, Velzenheim – was destroyed, he had been searching for those pieces. He had been searching for the lone-eyed gunner and the girl of darkness that followed him. In this upside-down world, he had been searching continuously for them, the two who had entered the outer-shell of this world, the Aurora Field. His meeting with these two people had changed the fate of Dixerio Maskane. His lazy and repetitive life was totally changed on that day because he had touched a piece buried in this

world, the piece called "truth".

What existed in this world, the mysteries that didn't even become legends, Dixerio had caught a corner of it all. A mysterious development had created a netlike structure allowing Electronic Fairies to communicate. As the guardian of En, he fought in an endless and expanding battle with the Wolf Faces, yet he continued to search for the truth. In the end, he figured everything was connected to Grendan's movement, that insane city. A city that was restricted from the En with other cities. A city that even roaming buses wouldn't want to visit. What was there – it wasn't a surprising question. Even a normal way of thinking would come to this question. What was there? As such, Dixerio infiltrated Grendan for the second time. The first time was a long time ago. The second time was a few days ago. But Heaven's Blade successors blocked him both times, and in the end, he didn't manage to reach the Inner Court.

Grendan, as expected of the city that even Wolf Faces feared.

But was his infiltrating action meaningless? The person that he had been searching desperately for was right before him. That beautiful girl was here. He had died in Velzenheim and reawakened in Zuellni. To meet this girl in the Academy City that was his second birthplace, that meant.....

"Let's talk about everything!"

But the girl didn't reply. Wordless, her gaze moved up and down the mask. And then.....

"Hey!"

She had disappeared without a noise, as if she had never existed. Her traces vanished amidst the sound of battle, but the confusion in his heart remained.

"Just what are you thinking? Did you come here to take it away?"

Dixerio removed his mask. The mask melted the moment it left his face. His hand balled into a fist and the remaining color of the mask scattered. The entire mask had disappeared.

"Is that your purpose? You only came for that thing?"

A Haikizoku slumbered in the mask that the girl had taken with her. Was that

her purpose? What a precious Haikizoku. Once an Electronic Fairy was connected to En, it wouldn't take long to find it. Did she appear in Zuellni just for that? But Dixerio wasn't the only person chasing after her. There were the Wolf Faces too. Why did she risk it?

"I don't get it!"

He desperately searched for her presence. Since this wasn't someone he could understand with normal logic, he thought she might still be somewhere in the city. But he found nothing.

"Damn!"

Though he wanted to look around in Zuellni, he couldn't do that. That victim was right beside his feet. She got caught in this fateful battle because of him.

Nina Antalk.

Her eyes that embraced a powerful will were now tightly shut. A trace of blood painted a corner of her mouth. He had used some reckless technique to break through her defense.

"It'd be bad if I don't release her from this fate."

Prioritizing his original aim, he spat blood and put a hand on the girl's sweaty forehead. He had to erase her memories. If he took away all the memories related to him, then she could return to the original world. If she didn't hold any speculation about the reality, then those things wouldn't affect her much. Those things were the Wolf Faces and the dimension that existed opposite this night sky.

The Kei from Dixerio's hand pierced through Nina's forehead to influence the area of the brain that governed memories. This was a Kei technique of thieves, a technique passed down in the Maskane family in Velzenheim..... a technique that matched the name of the City of Strong Desire.

He didn't plan to do anything really bad to the unconscious girl. But having looked at her recent memories, he had discovered that he needed to erase some deeper memories too. This might cause memory blockage. But he couldn't let her get caught any further. This girl had a sense of mission that far exceeded anyone else's. Her stubborn and inflexible personality was weak in

this unusual situation. So he must cut off those connections. Even if she was to sustain injuries in her memories, he must return her to a normal life.

But.....

The Kei connected her and Dixerio. In this moment, he felt something unnatural. The impact of a gun, and.....

"Nina!" came the shout behind him and the simultaneous shot.

The whip in his left hand extended and returned. The Kei that was used to interfere with one's vision made everything look a mess. The long-haired Military Artist held a rifle in his hands as he closed in on them.

"Tsk!" Dixerio left Nina on the ground and leaped away.

"Everything's a waste!"

That Military Artist went to Nina. He didn't chase after Dixerio.

Dixerio confirmed the movement of the Military Artist from the air and smacked his lips.



Her right eye still hurt and she couldn't stop the tears. That girl had disappeared, leaving behind the white wall.

Leerin couldn't leave this place. She didn't understand the situation, and she couldn't hear anything from outside. Was it because of the thickness of the wall, or that there weren't any fighting outside? Had the battle finished? She failed to judge the situation.

She was confused. What was happening. what had happened..... Did she understand anything? She couldn't comprehend, and that was why she was afraid.

"Lay.... fon," she called the name of her childhood friend in agony. But he was now on the battlefield. This wasn't a curse, nor was it an annoying duty. She liked him as a Military Artist. This had nothing to do with whether he held a

Heaven's Blade or not. Because he had grown up with her. He had trained through hardship, tolerating his pain to become an excellent Military Artist. He had bore the burden..... She had seen all of it. That was why she liked him.

Still, this wasn't a feeling of wanting to stay beside him. She just wanted to come to his side and hug him, then hear him say to her "It's ok". But that couldn't be done.

She didn't know that he was outside the city, riding his bike for Zuellni. The distance between them was too far.

Her right eye hurt. This was the same feeling of pain since the beginning. Nothing much had changed. Compared to the pain of dry eyes, overworked eyes and that of some foreign substance getting into the eye..... This pain was different from normal.

Something was moving and stimulating her nerves..... The pain seemed more like that of a painful tooth. The pain came from the center of the right eye, as if something that wasn't Leerin's existed there. She wondered whether her face had swollen, but touching her face with her hand told her it was fine. Just what was happening in her body? Who was that girl? She seemed to have seen her before.

From where? Where? Leerin kept thinking, trying to recall that place as she tolerated the pain. This felt like it was something very important to her. She remembered seeing only her back, but that beauty was unforgettable! The dark dress that was like a funeral dress, the long dark hair..... and the seemingly illusory girl that seemed to break and shatter at one touch.

Leerin couldn't remember.

She continued to ponder in desperation, fighting against the pain. Thinking was the only thing she could do to forget the pain.

A scene surfaced in her mind, something that seemed to be unrelated to the current situation. The time when she first met Synola. Tears had fallen at that time too. She didn't know how, but the tears had stopped. She didn't feel sad, and her eye didn't hurt. Even so..... What did Synola see at that time? What did she see in the right eye?

Remember.....!

On that day, Synola was sleeping on the lawn. The weather wasn't that warm, but she was sleeping as if she didn't care. Leerin was on her way to the entrance ceremony, but she got lost. When she saw Synola sleeping, a feeling of melancholy filled her chest. But before Leerin herself could react to this woman, her eyes were glued to her and tears had then fallen.

"Hey, why are you crying?" Synola had asked after waking up.

Leerin didn't know why.

Synola stared at her face, and it was at that time that surprise and shock showed on her face.

Why? Why was she shocked? Because Leerin was crying? In that case, Synola could have been shocked the moment she woke up. Or..... Did she hide her shock? Then why didn't she hide it the second time? At that time, she.....? What did she see?

Recall that memory. Recall it more clearly, more vividly..... Call forth the memories that she wasn't aware of. Though Leerin didn't do anything deliberately at that time, the memory of that action should be in her brain. Back then, she was fascinated by Synola's beauty. Hence Synola's beautiful face surfaced clearly in her mind. Her face..... Leerin concentrated on that face.

She saw something. Look at her eyes..... What was reflected in Synola's eyes. Normally, this feat wasn't possible, but Leerin gathered her concentration as if something was sucking her in. Her head hurt. Had the pain moved from her eye? Or was this caused by her intense level of concentration? – She wasn't sure.

She magnified Synola's eye in her memory. Her own image was reflected in the depth of the eye. Suddenly, something alluring shot through her. She saw her own face reflected in Synola's pupil. That face was also magnified. Leerin's own eye stared out at her as she looked at Synola.

Synola was shocked, but for some reason, a large beast with four legs was behind her. Leerin remembered that beast. It saved her from Gahard Baren's attack when he was possessed by a filth monster. But why did it appear beside

Synola?

That wasn't just it. Someone was at a far distance behind Synola..... No! Not behind. It overlapped with Synola and the beast. It wore a dark dress. Long black hair..... It was her! She was there! But why was she there? As if..... As if..... As if she was already on a screen that was projected on someone else's screen.....

(Huh.....?)

An unbelievable conclusion. But wasn't that it? If Leerin's eye was a screen.....

"That means....."

This girl was inside her? Inside her eye? Impossible! She denied her thinking through the pain and chill. Because, because.....

She remembered that the beast hadn't appeared beside Synola. She had many reasons to deny that conclusion. If it did exist, then Leerin herself couldn't have remained unaware of it! Memories were so vague that they always made delicate changes in one's experience.

Because, ahh, because of that.....

Somewhere deep inside Leerin had already accepted that conclusion, but right now, she didn't want to nod and admit it. But whether she admitted or denied it, it was meaningless. A meaningless truth – she felt as if someone was gossiping about her.

(She's inside me.....?)

"Just, what's going on.....?"

Uneasy. She had become the person in question – this uneasiness assaulted her. Had something changed in her body? What am I? Her strength left her as if she were tossed into a deep pit.

-an orphan.

This term drew the attention of her entire body. Her birth was unknown. Who gave birth to her? Who was her mother? She knew nothing.

-Am I not normal? -Or was I abandoned because I'm not normal?

She didn't understand!

"....."

Her heart called out for something. She bit her lip, noticing that feeling. She hated how weak she was.

When she came to, the pain had vanished. Her right eye was naturally closed. She felt the pain might return if she opened it, so she stood up with her hand on her eye.

Confusion remained. Her vision shook when she tried to stand up. She could bear it. Leerin gritted her teeth, standing up.

She had said she'd get some drinks for Mifi. The other girl would worry if she got back late. Meishen, who had been lively and full of spirit, had fallen. Naruki was tired from fighting. Leerin must not let them worry about her.

When she was young, she had helped the older people make meals. She could already cook on her own when Layfon became a Heaven's Blade successor. At that time, older brothers and sisters had gone off to work or gotten married. They had all left the orphanage. Even so, Leerin didn't show her weakness. It was her personality, not because she was forced. She didn't think she had borne any extreme hardships. She was only doing what the older brothers and sisters had done at their younger age.

She covered her right eye and intended to return as she staggered. She must find an excuse for not opening her eye. But before that, another fate had taken her.

"..... Eh?"

She thought it was her imagination because of her staggering steps. She had been on a hard floor, yet it felt sticky.

She looked down.

"..... Eh?"

The floor was gone. No. It was still there.

"Wh..... What?"

An artistic floor.

Face. Face. Face. Faces had emerged in the floor. They were everywhere. There wasn't even a crack between them. They were without expressions. Foreheads, closed eyes, mouths and noses..... Leerin couldn't tell whether they were male or female.

Face. Face. Face..... When she realized, the faces had covered up even the ceiling and the wall. Face. Faces surrounded her. Only she herself was in this dimension. Her right eye, the memories that she failed to explain, the uneasy encounter. The events that came one after another had taken Leerin to her limit.

"What is this!!"



A voice collapsed under agitation and anger.

In that moment, the air trembled. A ripple spread out in this dimension.

Those faces opened their eyes when the shaking of the air stopped.

"Ha—"

They all opened their eyes as if waiting for this moment. Pupils spun in unusually white eyeballs, as if they were looking for something. The pupils stopped moving when they saw Leerin.

"..... Found you!"

The voices surrounded her.

"Hohohohoho, Found you! Finally, finally found you!"

"Curse you, the end of the tie."

"Destroy you, the shadow of the moon."

"We're the conquerors of the past illusory world."

"I curse. I curse. I curse!"

All the faces said in a chorus. Strangely high spirits. Strange melody. Curses and lamentations surrounded her.

"You..... What are you! What are you!" Leerin said in fear and confusion. But nothing changed in this dimension. She cautioned that this might just be an illusion caused by fatigue and confusion..... But the hostility invading her every pore denied her thinking.

"Ohhhhhhhh..... We're to return to the illusion."

"You just need to obey, Child of the Moon!"

"The tie is weak, but it doesn't grant our wish."

"We curse....."

"We curse your soul to hover in endless darkness."

Hostility filled all the words. Leerin hugged her eyes as she pressed down on her right eye. It hurt again. As if the pain encouraged her, she stood up. The fear had disappeared.

"Curse.....?" someone laughed mockingly behind her. That laugh held within it contempt.

"To rely on that thing, you really are weak and lazy, unable to change no matter what the situation is! You group of rotten fools that can't disappear! Such foolishness makes you quite cute!"

Leerin turned around. The countless faces moaned "oh, uh". Their sound shook the air, but the sound of the newcomer was melodious, like that of a savior's.

Leerin was shocked. That girl was here. The white-skinned girl who wore a dark dress. But something was different. She didn't feel like a doll. She seemed angry. Mocking laughter dangled from the corner of her lips. Her eyes squinted into a line. And her beauty shocked even Leerin, who was of the same gender.

No! She must caution herself. This girl wasn't the one in her memory. This was another existence.

The girl waved her hand in annoyance. A mask appeared in her hand. A mask that looked like a beast. Leerin felt that she had seen it somewhere before but she couldn't remember.

The voices around them disappeared after the girl waved her hand. Leerin looked around and saw the mouths opened on the faces. She saw the faces shaking, shouting something, but no sound drifted into her ear.

"You trash that only knows to bark."

She breathed a sigh of relief at hearing the girl's voice. The confirmation that her senses were working had calmed her down.

The girl continued to speak. "But for the trash to appear here, has it really weakened to such a state?"

Calmness descended on Leerin. She began to think positively. Should she just leave everything to this girl? Wasn't it better to move according to how the girl acted..... She felt more relaxed even though she was still in this strange environment. She shook her head as if to shake loose the pain in her eye.

The girl watched her and smiled mysteriously. "Aah, you're bearing it? You're

the end! Well, perhaps that's it. Perhaps you really have the blood of the beginning!"

"Just what is this? How come.....?" Leerin asked. This girl knew what was happening around them.

"These things aren't real," the girl said, bored. She played with the mask in her hand.

"That's....."

She noticed that the girl had hidden the most important information because she found it boring. The girl smiled again, a smile of a child who was planning a prank. Something cruel hid behind her innocent smile.

"It's too late. You're powerless. You already concluded you're powerless in what you can do in this world. Even if you can do something for this powerless world, all you can do is keep this powerless world the way it is. Everything else is operating naturally. No one can turn it around. What can't be crafted is the end result....."

Leerin didn't understand, but a bad premonition took hold of her.

"What's happened?"

Something had happened. Something unbelievable had happened. Leerin only understood a small part of what the girl had said. No, she didn't really understand it. She guessed it from the bad premonition she got.

"You'll understand when you see it. Besides, it's time for you to journey. Didn't I say before? You can't do anything....."

The girl caressed Leerin's cheek with her unoccupied hand. Her icy fingers were soft as silk.

"Obtaining the shadow of the fake had called me from my sleep – though I don't like that. But the bell of the beginning was rung. The remnants that have been guarding the sky are near their limit. The war that aims for release is about to begin."

Her finger poked Leerin's skin. It didn't hurt, but the delicate finger held a power that didn't match its look. The girl moved her finger to Leerin's right eye.

"Let me tell you and give you a clue! The beginning of the war and what's happening right now – the reason that makes you people anxious. The fools that can't pass on. Ignasis. Rigzario."

Ignasis. Rigzario. Where had she heard of them? The Rigzario.....?

Leerin remembered as the girl's finger allowed her to open her eye.



When she came to, she saw Sharnid's face.

"You awake?"

Nina frowned with an expression that did nothing to ease him.

"What.....? I..... What happened?"

She didn't understand.

"At that time....."

She had fought the larvae that managed to get past the defense line. Her arm hurt. It was the result of using Raijin. And then..... What happened?

"How's the situation?" she stood up and asked.

Sharnid shrugged and looked at the sky. "Not sure! But the crisis is gone."

Nina followed his gaze..... True, the male filth monsters were gone.

"So what happened?"

"I said I don't know! It's just that a strange light took out the filth monsters."

Nina shook her head. Her entire body made noises.

"What is it?"

"Nothing much..... I just forced myself a bit?"

She knew why her arm hurt, but she didn't remember what made her entire body hurt. But since the battle was a mess, maybe her body had reached a certain limit without her knowing.

"That's 'a bit'?" he said with disapproval.

"Anyway, this is done. Let's go back!"

"True," she grabbed his extended hand and he pulled her up.

"Done?" she said to herself. It felt like they had been fighting for 3-4 days since the intercity match with Falnir. She didn't feel like this battle had finished though. In fact, wasn't the thing that caused this fiasco sleeping a light sleep somewhere they didn't know about? Would that thing be doing whatever it liked in a place Nina couldn't see? So many things made her worry.

"Aaa, it's ended..... Not sure about Layfon, but we can only trust him."

"Yes!"

Was Layfon still fighting the filth monster? Could he defeat it? Was he hurt? Those questions hardly calmed her.

"Felli's helping Layfon. She can't talk with us. If you want to know, you can only ask the Student President." His expression relaxed.

Nina agreed. Even if Felli had forgotten herself, she would not have forgotten the Student President. They could only head for the underground conference room then.

"Hey, hey! Before that you need to see a doctor....." Sharnid cut himself off. He had noticed something.

In this silence of the aftermath, Nina felt the remnants of battle. This was her second time feeling it.

"Hey, can you still fight?" he asked and held the Dite he had previously placed back in the weapon harness.

"Can't be helped!" she also reached her hand into the weapon harness. She'd have to fight even though her entire body hurt and the pain in her right wrist was becoming unbearable.

"Geez, just what's this for..... Aah, I see!"

Nina was still thinking when she heard him. These guys moved because this was the time.

The Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang.

All members released Sakkei. Did they notice she had discovered them? Or had they already aimed for the relaxing moment after battle? They had reduced their presence such that even Sharnid couldn't sense them, but they failed to escape Nina's unusual senses. Still, the opponents were veterans.

Presences that cut the air released from surrounding buildings. Nina could see ten or so people. Where were the rest? Should she retreat or fight? She hesitated as she and Sharnid restored their Dites.

The light of Kei scattered between them. Next came the light that surrounded Nina and Sharnid. Vivid and dense purple color, and then came the sound of successive explosions.

Mines of Psychokinesis.

"Retreat!!" Karian's shrill voice sounded.

Without thinking, the two jumped in the direction behind them. The Gang members didn't come around the explosion after them. Sharnid caught the flake that floated to where they had landed.

(Please run to the entrance of the shelter, 3B. The door will open after 30 seconds.)

"Felli!" Nina shouted. She should be supporting Layfon!

(I'm very busy. No time to say anything unnecessary.)

No more reaction from the flake. The Psychokinesis mines continued to explode behind them. were these Felli's mines or someone else's? She couldn't tell. She and Sharnid kept running.

They arrived at the door after 30 seconds. The path they were on split apart with noise. The two of them slid down that path. Once they were in, a Psychokinetic explosion buried the crack. The storm above them pushed them down the path. The two landed as if they were tossed through the entrance.

Karian appeared through the thick door of the shelter. The door shut along with the sound of machinery.

"It's good that you're all right."

"Student President, what's happened?"

She had forgotten the etiquette between seniors and juniors.

Karian's look was clear and refreshing when he looked at them.

"Do you find this hard to believe?"

She didn't answer. She already knew this had something to do with the Haikizoku sleeping inside her.

"Are the others OK? It'd be bad if only we escape but others become hostages," Sharnid said.

"We're still confirming the situation. Everyone will enter the shelter according to procedure. But that won't solve the problem....."

"Yes..... Even a small number of Military Artists can destroy this shelter. We can only use this place to buy some time. We need to regroup and find a place to counterattack....."

"We can resolve this early if we hand over the Haikizoku," Karian's gaze did not move away from Nina.

She knew the Haikizoku was inside her. Unconsciously, she put a hand on her chest.

And she felt something different. This wasn't a feeling caused by fatigue and injury. Though she wasn't sure of the situation, she still noticed the subtle change.

"Next, it's about time for you to give an explanation."

Karian's question seemed to come from somewhere far away, as Nina was concentrating on herself. Her memories..... Someone had defeated the male filth monster.

"The green light that defeated the filth monster. Was that you?"

Green light. A tiny memory stimulated the inside of her head. Her hand moved to her head.

She was looking at the sky. A male filth monster with wings spread was in the gray sky. Nina deeply felt her impotence. This pain had been with her since

entering Zuellni. She felt the pain and attempted to overcome it, but the pain came back. The place Military Artists stood was high. It wasn't a wall that one could jump over easily. Military Artists had to stand in this cruel world. Failure was not tolerated. Failure meant death, and possibly the death of the city too. If she failed, she'd greet such a fate.

It felt like her first time meeting the filth monsters. That terror. Unable to fulfill the promise she made with Layfon, terror had overwhelmed her. At that time..... What happened? Something had happened!

She couldn't remember whom she talked with. She knew she had conversed with someone, and that someone wasn't from Zuellni. This made her think of the Electronic Fairy..... So vague. Something moved. Something covered it. She couldn't remember, but then..... Yes!

"Does that mean....."

"What is it?"

She understood that unusual feeling. It was the feeling she had when she saved the Electronic Fairy, when Layfon was heavily injured..... the feeling of having lost something.

"The Haikizoku..... is gone?"

That feeling was gone.

"What did you say?"

Both Karian and Sharnid's expressions were stiff. Nina didn't know how to explain it. That thing was within her when she fainted, but it was gone when she woke. This meant something had happened during the time of her losing her consciousness. But what was it?



That man appeared above the city's multi-legs, on one of the numerous metal pillars that surrounded the city. When did he get there? No one noticed. The remnants of battle that suffused the city were now quietly disappearing. The air

gradually cooled as if losing its heat source. During this process, a sense of exhaustion bled through the wounded and tormented city.

But, there were people working in the dark at this time. Grendan's hunting dogs. The Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang had the Haikizoku as their goal, yet they had failed to obtain it. The girl that had the Haikizoku was snatched to somewhere unknown.

"This is unexpected. Who would have thought it'd awaken," the man said in a small voice.

He didn't know that face. He did feel that he'd seen him before, but that memory was forgotten the moment he pulled his gaze away. Perhaps even a plain face would leave behind an impression of "a plain face"!

"Though I think we might have to use the power because of the outsider. Is this for the sake of Shadow? Or is this the beginning of fate....."

He didn't know him, but he recognized the uniform. Though the long coat was not uncommon in other cities, this stood out in an Academy City. Yes, this man was there in the intercity match with Falnir. He was sent by the Academy City Alliance. The man who had contacted Savaris, the man who had awakened the Haikizoku in Nina.

This man silently placed his hand on his face. A mask appeared the next moment to cover his countenance. This was the same mask as Nina's, but it did not give off a green light.

The mask of a beast. This was proof of who he was – a Wolf Face.

"Then let's begin from this moment! The time to be released has finally come!" the man said again in a small voice.

Next, he took out his Dite from the inside of his coat and restored it. The Dite became a staff, a staff with a large decoration adorning its top.

Dong – The decoration rang with this sound.

"The shadow of the world. The shadow of the moon. Let darkness gather. For the real body of the Shadow. continue....."

The man's coat hung loose, opened, then vanished to reveal a new figure. His

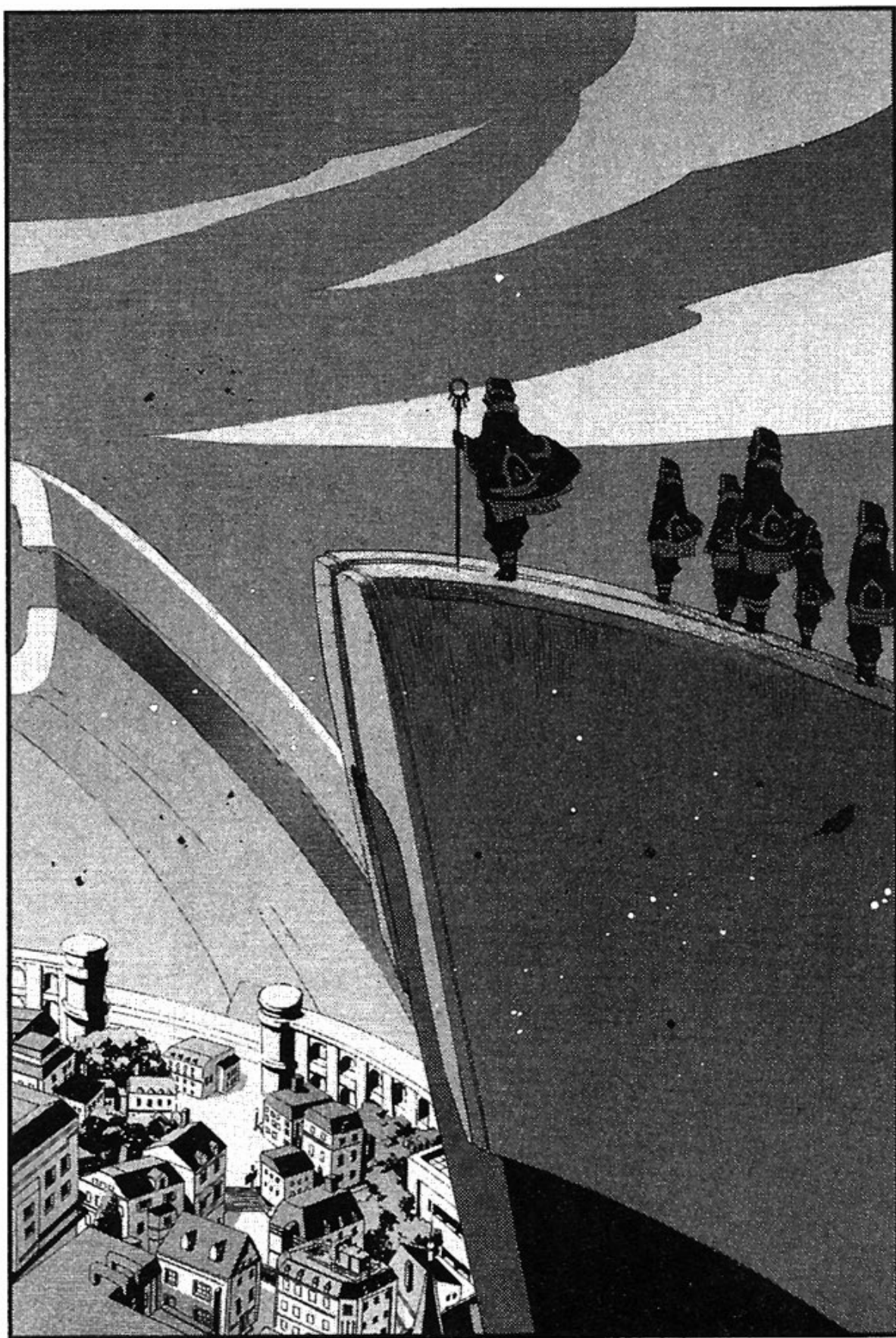
entire body was black. This was his new garment.

Dong – This sound rang.

"Shadow attracts shadow, but it continues to head for the real body of Shadow....."

Dong – This sound rang.

It was no longer just one person. People who wore masks gathered, as if emerging from the entrance of the air purification system to stand above the city's multi-legs.



"From now till the end of fate. Release the tie of the beginning. Release the real world of the end. The time for journey has come. Release from the infinite lines to advance forward."

Dong – This sound rang.

"Sacred Sword. Its servants!"

Dong – the sound dispersed into the air.

"The Faceman system set on the earth has finished its mission. Break through the embrace of thorns! This moment, that figure....."

Dong – This sound rang.

The sound was being absorbed. The sky, covered by the dust of battles, was released. It was a gray sky with an aura.

Small whirls appeared in this sky. A light containing seven colors. And the Wolf Faces walked as if to walk out of this city in search of something. And then the people who expanded Dixerio's battlefield..... were disassembling, disappearing. Their bodies crumbled into atoms from the top of their heads. Atoms of light that gave off seven colors. Dissolved. Their bodies collapsed.

"Sacred Sword! Nano Celluloid! Creatures in the form of humans who have been created!" The Wolf Face carrying the staff spoke as his body crumbled.

One by one, the Wolf Faces vanished. Their brains were gone. Elbows were gone. Bodies were gone. Legs and feet were gone. They left behind atoms of seven colors that spiraled upward and the staff that seemed to guide them up.

"Sacred Sword and you people loyal to destruction, the Staff of Flame that summons annihilation..... The Sword of the Devil that shatters the final war."

Even the staff had vanished.

"Leave your traces right now, right this moment."

Disappeared. Everything had disappeared. The atoms of seven colors had disappeared. Everything, including the traces that validated their existence were gone.

And a large hole soon dominated the sky.

Chapter 2: The City of Descending Shadow

The bike continued to run, but the hand of the temperature gauge was trembling near the top, and he could feel the heat of the tires beneath his feet. He must now consider the worst possibility – he might have to abandon the bike and run back to Zuellni. It was impossible to return without a speed that was as fast as the bike's. And if he did that, he might use up all of his strength before he reached Zuellni. So, before all these happened.....

Layfon blocked Savaris' Kei shots with the Katana. The other Heaven's Blade successor was riding his bike ahead of him. Savaris was standing on the bike with his foot on the accelerator, his body leaning in Layfon's direction. Layfon shot back his Kei as a return gift and Savaris took the attack with external Kei.

They continued to exchange explosions between them.

In the next moment, Savaris had torn apart the screen of dust to appear before him. His expression was clear behind the helmet. With elated eyes that seemed to twist, Savaris began his attack.

Left fist.

Layfon quickly took evasive measures, but he still felt the Kei brushing past his helmet. The wind pressure made his body sway. Not at all intimidated, he swung the Shim Adamantium Dite. But Savaris kept pressing forward, flying past Layfon's side. The bike shook violently, its speed suddenly reducing. Savaris had grabbed the rear of the bike with his injured right hand. He turned his body around and sent a kick at Layfon with only his right hand as support.

Layfon jumped. Savaris followed.

Fist and blade clashed. The hammer of a fist and the strike of the Katana shattered the air and threw off sparks. Savaris was trying to find a chance to destroy his opponent's vision device. At the same time, Layfon was looking for

an opportunity to send Savaris' vision device flying. The two of them attacked to protect their devices.

Layfon landed on the bike. He attacked with his foot and Savaris avoided it by returning to the sky. The enemy next kicked at Layfon's jaw. He then moved his left arm and stabbed with his hand. Savaris' unusual strength and reflexes came from his training for close quarters combat. His vertical body spin became horizontal. Layfon sensed bloodthirstiness behind his head and quickly bent down with his neck, but the next kick was ready for him.

This style of battle was natural. Savaris' real strength lay in his bare-handed close quarters combat rather than with the Heaven's Blade. It was natural for him to fight an enemy bare-handed. It was also natural to fight with a suitable distance.

Above the bike, Layfon and Savaris fought, each executing top-notch techniques.

Savaris' figure vanished from the path of Layfon's sweep-kick. He jumped to return to his own bike. But Layfon's attack followed straight after. He deflected it with his left fist and sent out a huge ball of Kei to counterattack.

If Layfon didn't stop this attack, the bike might get disintegrated. Not that he could just ignore this though, but the ball of Kei wasn't aimed at him. It flew past Layfon's left hand side.

Because of the recoil of firing off that huge ball of Kei, Savaris made a temporary landing before jumping back onto the bike. His Kei caused a distant hill to explode. The smooth surface of the hill that was shaped by wind and rain split apart, and the thing that sustained the hill was destroyed. The earth stirred. A bad premonition rose in Layfon.

"You mean it?"

Fermaus' electronic voice was devoid of emotions, but Savaris could still sense the reproach and shock in it. He looked at the smoke and dust that surrounded the collapsed hill, and laughed.

"The spectator didn't find this interesting. That's unexpected!"

He truly did find this unexpected. Had Fermaus not fought outside a city? Or had the Mercenary Gang not had this experience? If that was the case, they should hire people who had fought and defeated filth monsters alone.

"If that hill collapsed, even you'd be buried."

"Yeah, I know."

So that was what his doubt was?

"But isn't it unfair if I'm the only one not hurt?"

"....."

He spoke like he was speaking his last word. "But if I were ok, what if he abandoned his bike and took mine?"

It looked like Savaris' purpose was to come to destroy things. Fermaus thought he only did this to prevent Layfon from reaching Zuellni ahead of him, even at the cost of his life.

"Compared to that, how are things on your side? Did you get the thing?"

"..... The plan has failed."

"Aaaa, but you're still monitoring that girl, aren't you?"

"..... You knew?"

The rolling sand and soil were closing in, he could only speak the key points. Fermaus paused for a little while.....

"We've promised."

"Promised what.....?"

"It's better that you don't know," Fermaus cut him off and stood up to hold the handle of the bike. Rumbling sounded in his ears.

Fermaus said something but Savaris lacked the patience to listen to him. He must use this opportunity to avert the crisis. He couldn't suppress the excitement in himself anymore.

"If you knew everything, you'd definitely live a life that wouldn't be what you wanted. That's what I think, even though that's what I wish for!"

The bike flew. Sand slid beneath the tires. The bike landed and shook. With his foot on the accelerator, Savaris used his own balance to drive the bike. Layfon was doing the same behind him. Bloodthirstiness stimulated his back. His heart thumped expectantly. The excitement threatened to burst from his chest.

"Haha!"

The huge rumble drowned out his laughter.



At this time, Mifi was uneasy. Meishen had been sent to the clinic after fainting due to exhaustion. Her childhood friend, who used to sleep beside her, was gone, but she then realized that even Leerin was not here.

(She did say..... She's gone off to buy some drinks?)

She couldn't quite remember what Leerin had said. Mifi herself must be tired too! She thought back as she messed with her hair.

(But isn't that too long just to buy a drink?)

She wasn't sure, but she did feel that a long time had passed. She pushed the need to confirm the time to the back of her mind. Though she didn't remember exactly when Meishen fell, regardless, a long time had passed.

(Did something happen?)

But if that was the case, according to Leerin's personality, she wouldn't have left without telling Mifi.

(Strange.)

Dragging around wouldn't help with anything. She looked at Meishen who showed no signs of waking. If she woke and Mifi was not around, she would feel lonely! But before she woke..... Mifi cut off her train of thought and stood up.

"Hey, what's up?"

A voice that she hadn't heard for a long time.

"Naruki!" Mifi said loudly, forgetting she was in a clinic. Looking at her red-haired childhood friend, she widened her eyes.

Naruki was wrapped in bandages. Though she had changed into her uniform that was devoid of dust and blood, she had failed to hide the bandages. Bandages covered her forehead, left eye and right arm. Bandages stabilized her ankles and knees.

"Ah, Ahhh..... This? It's not as serious as it looks!" she laughed, but Mifi was still stiff.

"I just need to get on the treatment machine and my body recovers quickly, but the problem is overworking the Kei vein. It takes time to recover. What a shame."

The phrase "overworking the Kei vein" reminded Mifi of Nina. That person had fainted precisely because of that condition.

"Are you all right?"

"Truth be told, it hurts more than my tense muscles," Naruki smiled bitterly.

Mifi felt more relieved. "Uh, Mei's fainted."

"Uh..... Ah."

She explained the reason behind it.

"Naruki, please stay with Mei."

"Uh? What's up?"

She told her about Leerin. Naruki knew Leerin too. Her expression sank.

"That's strange. Ok, I'll come too!"

"Eh? But....."

"If we come across people doing something illegal, I can deal with it," she looked at Meishen. She was still unconscious.

"Let's go."

"Ah, ok."

Naruki gave her back a push and walked ahead of her. Mifi followed in a

fluster. Her footsteps staggered like a set of scales. Her childhood friend was important, but a new-found friend was also important. One person was sleeping, the other was missing.

(Yeah, I can't not go!)

Having decided, she chased after Naruki with resolve.

"Ah, Leerin!"

The target unexpectedly appeared after they walked past a few corners.

"Ah..... You two," Leerin looked at them in shock as well. She lacked life in her face, but that couldn't be helped in this situation. Everyone in the shelter held such a face. Even Leerin, the person with such a strong personality, had changed. But..... a question surfaced in Mifi.

(Did anything happen when Mei fell?)

"Naruki, are you all right?" Leerin said. She hadn't seen Naruki for a while too.

"Aa, compared to that, what are you doing here?"

"I wanted to quiet down so I went for a stroll. Sorry. I said I would get some drinks before."

"Ah, um, it's all right," Mifi shook her head, but the question remained. She remembered Leerin hadn't looked this bad before Meishen fell unconscious. Besides, she was the only one who had been encouraging her and Meishen.

(Something's happened?)

"Speaking of which, did anything interesting happen?"

Mifi looked at the corner that Leerin had appeared in. It wasn't a straight passage, and its end seemed to have been blocked off. A dark corner that even the smallest amount of light couldn't illuminate seemed to hide something bad within it. Leerin was already walking back with Naruki, concerned about the bandages wrapped around her body.

".....?"

Mifi cocked her head in incomprehension.

While expressing her surprise at Naruki's appearance, Leerin peeked at Mifi's reaction.

(Has she found out.....?)

It was the same as expected. And if it became reality, it'd cause some problems. Mifi didn't seem to have seen that tragic scene. That scene was still here. Leerin saw Mifi looking at her. That thing was still here on the side, but Mifi had failed to see it.

(So normal people can't see it?)

This was the same as the time at Myath. The bird-like Electronic Fairy was trapped, but Savaris didn't see anything. Why was it like that? She still wasn't sure. Anyway, Leerin hadn't thought of the event in Myath. She had forgotten it along with her encounter with Nina there.

(That child..... What is she?)

This girl looked the same as the girl in Myath, but she acted completely different. She had revealed something to Leerin. Revealed.....? Was Leerin the one who caused everything? Or did that mysterious girl make it happen? Leerin confirmed the place that Mifi had looked at. The scene was still there, but Mifi didn't see anything. Was this Leerin's own imagination then? Hope appeared in her. But that event didn't feel like an illusion. It happened in reality. But what if this was made by someone – She was confused.

"Did anything happen?"

"Huh, nothing."

Naruki noticed the uneasy expression that appeared for a split second. She was quick to amend her expression. It wouldn't be strange if even Mifi had noticed it.

Leerin thought to herself that she could not let them discover anything more.

(This, this unusual situation.....)

Even though she didn't want to, she had to remember it. Remember the thing that changed that scenery.

Countless number of faces were destroyed. They disappeared, leaving nothing behind. When that girl's hand touched Leerin's right eye, everything had vanished. What Leerin's right eye saw was gone. Instead, something had replaced it. It was an eye, an eyeball. No, just something that looked like an eyeball. She didn't feel any life and gentleness from the eyeball. It felt hard as glass. The thing multiplied..... And gradually overtook the entire floor, wall, ceiling. They then descended onto the floor. The sound of hard falling rain hurt her ears. She covered her ears.

Even so, the sound of glass breaking was loud. The girl's laughter pierced her eardrums.

"Hohoho..... Ahhahahahaha! It's begun! And then everything will end."

She continued to laugh through the rain of glass. An insane laughter that contained tremendous emotion. In her voice weaved happiness, sadness, love and hate.

"It's finally..... finally begun! I've waited for so long. So long!" the tired girl said, as if facing some kind of impact.

Leerin had the sudden urge to hug the girl. She was in such a strange situation, yet she couldn't suppress that urge. However, the girl got ahead of her to hug Leerin from behind. The girl felt tiny, illusory and gentle.

"Welcome back," she said next to Leerin's ear.

And the feeling vanished.

Leerin looked around. She was alone. The pain in her right eye was also gone. She heard Mifi and Naruki's voice as she stood there, confused and perplexed. She didn't know how this came to be. Anyway, she must keep calm and pretend that nothing had happened. Leerin clapped her hands against her cheeks and appeared before the two girls.

(Uh, it's ok. It's ok.....)

Leerin walked as she listened to the two talk. What was to happen next? Would anything change in her body? Just what was her own identity? Uneasiness filled her, but she swallowed it and hid it all in her heart. She really wanted to tell someone what she had gone through, but she knew she

shouldn't.

(Layfon's doing his best. Everyone else is too..... I can't speak of this with anyone.)

She must not add to the burden of others. This calmed her down. This problem came from herself. She must not tell anyone of this at this time. She must keep her expression calm. Meishen, Mifi and Naruki must be feeling uncomfortable about the current situation. In this hour, when they didn't know what the future held – their uneasiness was obvious, so she must not give them cause for worry.

She then heard a voice coming from far away. A voice calling for help.

"Has a Military Artist returned to the shelter?" Naruki said. This meant danger was still around. If it was safe, that news should already have been conveyed to everyone.

Leerin swallowed her own worry.

"I'll go help," she said and ran. She couldn't face these two anymore.

Mifi and Naruki did not notice Leerin's reason behind her action. Leerin did it because she might not be able to hide her uneasiness before those two. She might end up telling the truth or making a mess of the truth. She might even ask why the two of them hadn't noticed she was different.

Naruki and Mifi could usually notice any tiny changes in her, but they hadn't noticed anything right now.

They hadn't noticed the truth behind Leerin's closed right eye.



Nina detected a tiny sense of distress from Karian, as if he didn't know what to do. But he recomposed his expression so quickly that no one else could have detected it. He had almost immediately swallowed this shocking truth. What psychological strength he possessed!

"What's going on?"

"To understand this....."

She was restless. How should she explain this? She had not the words to describe the sense of perplexity and difficulty she felt about the situation. When did the Haikizoku disappear from her? She just realized a moment ago that it was gone. But the time of its disappearance hadn't been too far from now.

(Could it be during that time.....)

When she had lost consciousness. Something had happened during that time, and when she woke, the male filth monster was already defeated. But she didn't know who had beaten it. The Mercenary Gang might have fought it, but if what Sharnid said was true, then they weren't the one who defeated it. Was it the Haikizoku?

"Did anyone see the person who defeated the filth monster?" Nina asked.

"Haven't heard from the Military Artists, and the Psychokinesists haven't reported anything either."

"What about Felli?"

"Felli's still supporting Layfon. She didn't have the time to look at the city's situation."

But Felli helped with their retreat a moment ago. Was this proof of how worried she was about them? Nina didn't think so. Though they did successfully escape from the Mercenary Gang, the plan was just too smooth.

She wasn't the only person with doubts.

"Perhaps Felli's been keeping an eye on the Captain?" Sharnid asked.

Karian nodded without hesitation. "Do you think I'd ignore the person who might have brought danger to the city?"

"Well, that's true," Sharnid admitted and shut his mouth.

Nina didn't protest despite the complicated feelings inside her. She felt she was the worst for not saying anything, but she couldn't conclude how bad it was. In order not to get other people involved in the fight that had once taken place in Myath, in order to meet Dixerio, she must hide everything within her.

(If I see him again.....)

She must ask him of all that had transpired. But then, would he tell her everything?

"Where's Felli now?"

"She's in the underground conference room, but you can't meet each other yet. This situation is still urgent."

"I see. Is Layfon safe?"

Urgent. Was Layfon still fighting the filth monster? How was he? Was he still putting up a painful fight?

"He's successfully eliminated the filth monster," Karian said. It was good news, but he relayed it with less enthusiasm than expected. He probably didn't have the time to even feel relaxed. Wasn't it his usual self to smile? His expression looked stiff, as if he was doing his best not to let his true feelings show.

"But there's something worse than the filth monster."

"Student President.....?"

It was still his style to act like he knew everything. However, as expected, the relaxing manner was lacking.

"Heaven's Blade successors are heading here."

Nina felt as if someone had hammered her with External Kei from behind her head.

(Finally.....)

The Heaven's Blade must be Savaris, whom she had seen once in Myath. Should she say this..... She had been hesitating since returning to Zuellni, not knowing what the outcome was and not having predicted this current situation. But Karian's following explanation shocked her. Savaris stood on Layfon's side only up till the moment they finished the filth monster.

"I don't know how the other side thinks. But I'm thankful we stood on the same side till the filth monster was defeated."

Savaris must already know that Nina had the Haikizoku. He had no reason to leave Zuellni and fight the filth monster. All he needed to do was to wait for Zuellni to sink into the crisis, wait for the Haikizoku to awaken then snatch Nina away. If it was Savaris rather than the Mercenary Gang that took action, Nina might not be here now. Thinking of Savaris' unfathomable actions, she could only say she was lucky. Next, Karian was also thinking the same thing, but he seemed to think fortune wasn't with them just because they defeated the filth monster. Perhaps a bigger problem was now closing in on Zuellni's throat.

"..... Just what's happened?"

A hateful feeling welled up in her chest, but she found no sense of premonition in it. It was just a hateful feeling.

But something bad really had happened.

"Someone else, not Layfon and not that Heaven's Blade, defeated the filth monster."

Nina didn't understand.

"That means there's another Military Artist around? Or that there's another Heaven's Blade successor....." she speculated and found herself speechless. Fear crept up her as she realized how serious Grendan was in obtaining the Haikizoku. But Karian shook his head.

"This isn't that simple. Even Layfon and that Heaven's Blade failed to defeat the filth monster. They couldn't defeat it! Even though that Heaven's Blade successor didn't have a Heaven's Blade with him, he was on par with Layfon. Yet the two of them couldn't defeat it," he said, again, with less emotion as expected. But the calmness in his voice faded as he spoke. Sweat dotted his forehead. Perhaps even he didn't want to believe his own words.

"That person defeated it with just one strike, and he wasn't even on the battlefield. I don't know what the distance was, but he struck from a place that no one could see."

"Hey, hey, that's ridiculous!" Sharnid said. "Layfon couldn't defeat that thing at a close distance but this guy did it with a long distance shot? A distance that we can't even see? Even the Kei cannon can't achieve that? Who would have so

much Kei!"

"Yes, if possible, even I wouldn't want to believe," he said with a bitter smile. "It'd be good if it were just a joke. If not, the city that person's in might be heading for Zuellni now, and that city's probably Grendan..... If it's just a joke, if it's just a nightmare, that would have been so good."

Nina couldn't say anything. Sharnid was also shocked numb by the news and forgot to voice his consternation, but he was the first to recover.

"Grendan's here!? That's a brilliant prank. I can't even laugh," he said. "Why would a normal city come to an Academy City!"

(The Haikizoku.)

But it wasn't Grendan's citizens that need the Haikizoku, right? That was why the Mercenary Gang was formed to gather information outside the city. Humans could not control a city's route. First, the number of selenium mines that a city possessed affected its route, and second, the city's consciousness was the one to decide where to go. Nina had heard that Grendan was a cruel city. It was frequently attacked by filth monsters. Nina couldn't help but wonder whether the Regios was truly trying to survive. Even the existence of Heaven's Blade successors wasn't enough to ease her. To look at this city from a longer term perspective, one could think that it wouldn't be a far-fetched idea for a lack of Heaven's Blade successors to arrive. Shouldn't they be making preparations then?

But what if Nina's speculation was wrong? Perhaps the royal family of Grendan knew how to control a city's path. Perhaps..... If she was right.....

"Perhaps we're all wrong," Karian said. "Perhaps it's not the citizens of Grendan that need the Haikizoku, but Grendan itself."

Same conclusion as her, but this was an Electronic Fairy that had lost its city. Why would it need another Electronic Fairy? In truth, if not hostility, Nina felt that Zuellni and the Haikizoku repelled each other when the two Electronic Fairies were inside her. A normal Electronic Fairy didn't need the Haikizoku? But.....

"Is..... Grendan the only city that acts like this?"

"I can only think like that," Karian agreed with her. "Considering maximizing one's number of selenium mines, Grendan's plan of overtaking the territories of filth monsters is the best. But that plan requires people with strength on the level of a Heaven's Blade successor. If that couldn't be done, the city would be destroyed."

"But it's not possible to gather those people?"

"I don't think humans are creatures who can adapt to any environment. That's why we need weapons to help us become stronger."

"That's why they need the Haikizoku?"

"That can only be my conclusion. But there might even be a deeper reason behind this....." Karian said..... and the ceiling shook. No, the entire shelter that they were in shook. This meant even the city itself was shaking.

"Is this the Mercenary Gang?" Karian said to the Psychokinesist through the flake as he kept his balance with his hand on the wall.

The Psychokinesist recovered quickly and called. "This, this is bad."

Not Felli, but Nina remembered that voice. It seemed to be the Psychokinesist of the first platoon.

"What is it?"

(Filth monsters! And they are numerous.....)

It didn't feel like the words came from a Psychokinesist. In fact, he hadn't finished speaking. But the current situation was enough to make him lose his cool. Everyone understood that point.

(A large number of filth monsters are dropping from above!)

Who could truly understand this reality?

"What did you say?"

Even Karian couldn't say anything more beyond this.



They were descending from the sky.

"It's begun!"

This was a girl wearing a dark dress. A girl of dream-like illusion. Her skin was white without blood. The wind blew her black hair, lifting it to seemingly cut through the dark sky. Because of the fights, a large amount of dust floated in the air, but no traces of dirt could be found on the girl's face, skin and clothes. As if she was ephemeral. Everything bowed down to her.

And everything that happened now was the terrifying truth. She was connected to the beginning. She knew how this world came to be. She was darkness. Her name was Nelphilia. She halted her steps to look at the large hole in the sky. That hole was flat and huge, as if someone had drawn it on a piece of paper.

But the light of seven colors shone in that dark hold. Atoms of seven colors, the sparks created by the clashing of worlds.

The Aurora Field.

"It's begun," the girl repeated.

She looked at the numerous unusual forms that flew out of the hole. The number of these monsters proved the seal on the moon had yet to be released.

Monsters continued to descend and land on Zuellni. One appeared before Nelphilia. These things differed from filth monsters. Though filth monsters had different forms, all larvae and females were insects, and male filth monsters were insects that crawled. Only the aged phase filth monster could change its form as it liked. If that was the truth, then the monsters here were filth monsters in their aged phase? But compared to each aged phase filth monster's different ways of hunting, these monsters were surprisingly uniform. They each had two legs, two arms, and bodies with four limbs..... It wouldn't be strange to call them grey, five meter high giants.

They could be called giants. Only, their heads were the exceptions. A block of muscle replaced the brain, and on the face was a mouth that one could only see in a manga. Sly, richly red mouths split open as if smiling, revealing sharp rows

of teeth. Six crimson balls made up of the muscles of the chest. Perhaps they were sensing organs.

"So ugly!" Nelphilia said with a frown. "Have you waited for too long and lost your sense of beauty? What a shame!"

The balls on the chest of the giant flashed to confirm Nelphilia's existence. It howled. Rumbling shook the air. Its comrades called in response. Roaring rose one after another.

Nelphilia's hair floated. A mocking smile adorned her face.

"I knew you'd come here sooner or later."

The giants surrounded her. They blocked out the light and their shadows swallowed her figure. One could no longer discern her black clothes from the darkness. Only her hands and face stood out in the dark.



"Zuellni.... Yes, you already understood?" she caressed the darkness elegantly.

A change rippled outward. Darkness dispersed. Something with a face emerged from it.

It was a creature that was long and delicate like an earthworm, yet, rough scales covered its body, and its legs were like tree branches. Teeth, and a large mouth opened on the round brain.

"About ugliness, that side is the same. You can't speak human language!" she sighed, looking at the creature that writhed and rolled in darkness. She didn't want them to look like this, but she didn't want to give up. This intention came from her expression.

The giants howled, as if noticing the danger of this existence before them. They swung their fists and giant rods stretched out from them. The weapons formed from their fists and stretched into some length. When the form had taken its complete shape, it was a clunky sword that was thick and large.

Nelphilia's figure vanished in the darkness. The giants jumped up and down on their spring-like legs. The impacts of the giants were in the process of annihilating everything around them.

The speed of their attacks was the same as the Military Artists, but the power far surpassed them. In the midst of the storm created by the impacts of the assaults, many strange creatures swam through the air with their long bodies. They attempted to fly for the giants using the floor as its leaping point.

The giants took the attack with their swords and cut open a small corner of the darkness to reveal the normal streetscape. Many strange creatures scattered due to the sword attack and the wind pressure, but many more started tearing apart the giants. Sharp teeth sank into skin that was hard as rock, tearing apart skin and muscles, but instead of the giants bleeding, many tiny bubbles grew on the wounds to cover them.

Even so, the creatures did not stop tearing and biting. They did not stop even though their bodies were pulled apart and twisted into coils. The wounds on the giants continued to expand. Some giants tossed away their weapons to pull the creatures off, their roars and howls intense and painful.

One creature flew into a giant's opened mouth. The roaring turned strange and stopped. The creature worked its way into the mouth and began eating the muscles inside. The giant closed its mouth to sink its teeth into the creature's scales, destroying them and peeling one off. White blood seeped through the giant's teeth and lips.

However, the creature did not stop biting. It kept attacking with its tortured body. Its scales were gone, its meat was torn. It bled, but it did not stop. Did it not feel pain? Or did it keep moving deeper into the giant's body out of a sense of mission?

The giant's body twisted. It raised its arm and attempted to grab the thing that had invaded its mouth. Another creature had lashed onto its body to restrict its movement. One climbed up its arm, one wrapped itself around its leg.

The giant fell back onto the ground. No one knew how much damage that impact had wrought on it. The stubborn invader had put a full stop on the giant's life. Looking at its tail, exposed outside the giant's body, it had already reached the giant's abdomen.

The giant's abdomen expanded, and cracks ran through its surface. The abdomen was pulled apart. Still, the giant's body was hard and strong. A long thing that looked like an intestine flew in the air and fell. It was originally inside the giant. Something that looked like an organ but might not be an organ. This giant did not hunt like normal creatures.

The giants had lived in this world for a long time. They, however, differed from filth monsters, who had a habit of consuming each other. Who knew, maybe they were the same after all. Maybe they were two branches of the same ancestor a long time ago. Maybe these giants were the ancestors of the filth monsters, fighters that were stronger in strength.

The strange monsters ate the giant's dismembered body. Strong acid in the strange monsters immediately melted down the giant's cells, preventing it from regenerating.

Nelphilia watched this appalling scene in the darkness. Just one. It took so much time to destroy just one giant. The result of what Zuellni's students had

made, what Nelphilia had hidden. And the result was only of this level.

"This can't be it!"

Just one. So much time to destroy just one. This was enough to quickly destroy normal filth monsters and break through the defense of Military Artists. Enough to even handle the larvae's attack. But that wasn't the case with this opponent. The result of the students' research was not enough.

But she only had this strength now. What a shame. She was more powerful when she was first borne to this world, yet her power had waned over time. As she thought, they should have continued the research, but time was near when she woke. So she had let the students train and she had left Zuellni. Her heart still hurt when she looked at that empty Electronic Fairy. She felt strange about that feeling. Back then, she cared not for the people that she used. She felt less hurt when she controlled the students. Her philosophy was to use up everything she had, so it was natural to use what was around her, but why did she harbor a special feeling for that Electronic Fairy? As an Electronic Fairy, one must bear the painful reality – even if one lost a city to filth monsters, lost its people and had to greet a situation more serious and painful. As she thought she had to accept everything happening now, she thought it was natural to take what worked for her. And even if Zuellni thought the same as her, the hurt remained in her heart. It took so long to just eliminate one giant. She regretted and hated that fact.

The hole remained open in the sky. Strange creatures and giants continued to rain down the city.

Perhaps this city would really be destroyed. The sound of the end, the sound that came from despair and broken pieces might release this world thoroughly.

What would Nelphilia do when that time came?

She looked at the hole above her. Would they come over? If that happened, would her power recover? She had no such confidence.

"..... God!" she laughed mockingly.

She was calm before Leerin, but now she was unbelievably weak. Because she had just awakened from her slumber? Or was she confused and lost in the face

of this deteriorating situation? If that was the case, she truly had become weak. More serious than losing her strength, her heart was weakening at this truth.

She sank into despair, not at the current situation, but at the change in herself. She had lived long. She wasn't even sure whether her body was classified as a living creature. She was here at the birth of the world, and she had continued living for revenge. Since the moon disappeared, she had spent everyday looking at the sky. Even when she was dormant, her consciousness flew for the sky above.

Right now, the moon was gone. Not the night. The moon was still here, but she waited for the moon to disappear. On a certain level of meaning, the moon had disappeared – it had descended. The day for that time to come probably was soon!

She thought she must find herself before that time came. She needed something, but she didn't know what she needed. Even so, there was something she had to do now.

"I can still buy some time!" she said lightly.

Next, other strange creatures appeared around her in the dark. All of the "Guardian Beasts" had been released.

Shadows gathered to become darkness once more, spreading out to cover the entire city.

Ripples dispersed, and Guardian Beasts ran out to meet the descending giants.

Chapter 3: Lance Shelled City

She wanted to escape. This wasn't her first time thinking of it. She had wanted to escape from the time when she didn't want to become a Psychokinesist.

With what happened in her home city – The filth monsters' attack on the Trade City Santoburuge; that time when she and her brother took a rest while traveling to Zuellni – she had experienced a real battle for the first time, watching the mercenaries fight. Filth monsters were terrifying. But that feeling was similar to watching a monster in a movie. A Psychokinesist's main job was to gather and deliver information. This feeling came about because she did not have to stand in the frontline.

Was this the battlefield? This real feeling of being on a battlefield came to her after the fight. A part of Felli's body felt it as she saw the corpses of filth monsters and Military Artists. A tragic scene that would never appear in a cruel movie, and that had deeply pierced through her nerves. Was this the world that she was born into? Was this the fate set in stone from the day she was born? She noticed and understood the real meaning. She had kept fleeing from that time but had failed. She came to Zuellni to find another possibility, but she was asked to help as a Psychokinesist even here. And then.....

(Are you all right?)

The fight continued. That person was still fighting. He ignored her question. She could hear his every breath. He had just jumped from the bike and fought an intense aerial fight with Savaris. The time he now had was short. Rather than responding to Felli's call, it was better to regulate his breathing with the time he had.

The bike that flowed out from the stream of soil and stone had sustained heavy damages. Still, it continued to run. Suspicious smoke issued from the

engine. Savaris' bike, riding before Layfon's, was in a similar condition.

Felli had attempted many ways. She had wanted to use the flakes for communication purpose to construct a Psychokinesis mine net. A method she took notice of during that time when she used it to aid Nina. Felli had always been concentrating on gathering information. A Psychokinesis mine was only used for self-defense. However, Layfon had asked her to arrange a mine at that time when they fought the filth monster in its matured phase. Felli knew that way of fighting. The 1st platoon defeated the 17th platoon through that strategy. But that was Felli's first time using it in a real battle. If she wanted to use it again, she must continue to train and hone her skill. That was why she didn't use the Psychokinesis mine, why she didn't want to use it. But now she must suppress her wish.

The light of explosion surrounded Savaris, yet it failed to harm him. The Psychokinesis mine had yet to explode. Something had interfered with Felli before she could trigger them off. Another Psychokinesis power had taken over Felli's flake and prevented the explosion. She immediately thought it was the Psychokinesist of the Mercenary Gang. He had interfered with her when she got caught. She had felt surprised and regret for that first time experience. Fermaus, the Psychokinesist who wore a mask. Overtaking his flake was like talking about something out of this world. The Mercenary Gang was the one that hooked Savaris over. When Haia was still the leader of the Mercenary Gang, Felli had never felt the threat to be as large as it was now. A truth she couldn't cover up. The current feeling really didn't sit well with her.

Fermaus' flake wanted to get closer. To counterattack? Felli had already learned the way to defend. Blocking and overtaking the flake happened at the same time. She would not let the enemy's flake get close to Layfon. At the same time, she had searched for Fermaus' location, concluding that he might be in Zuellni too. Although Zuellni was in chaos, this was still Felli's territory. If she could discover his location, she might be able to do something. And if she could carry that out, it would add some trouble for Savaris on a certain level.

But what was the meaning behind her action?

Layfon was still trying. He had used different strategies against Savaris, but now he only concentrated on driving the bike. If Felli did something, would she

make him more impatient? She hated that possibility.

She lifted her head once more to look at Layfon, who had once again entered an aerial fight. Even the power of Psychokinesis failed to discern the situation in detail. The ripples of impact in the fight had reduced. Both sides were fighting at a steadier rate, but Felli couldn't tell whether they were employing more techniques in the fight or not. Still, staring at them might not be entirely meaningless.

A loud rumbling sounded. A sound that she had been ignoring. In one split second, that sound came to her through the flake and shook her core. It flowed into her brain along with other information and shook her eardrums. The huge pressure brought her an unusual feeling of despair. The gigantic multi-legs of a city were chasing after Layfon and Savaris, its shadow covering everything around it, making everything dimmer and dimmer. Grendan was chasing those two, and it was getting closer to Zuellni.

The two fighters separated. Savaris laughed. Layfon's face showed a grimace. He didn't ponder the meaning behind this fight. All he wanted was to finish the fight. However, preventing Savaris alone was meaningless, because Grendan was here. According to Felli's calculation, Grendan would arrive at Zuellni ahead of Layfon. Besides..... Mysterious enemies were currently attacking Zuellni. They were filth monsters, but they felt different from past filth monsters.

All of Zuellni's Military Artists had retreated to the shelters. They wanted to keep fighting, but they were exhausted through the long fight. Their spirits were at their limit. Even so, the situation continued, and no one could stop it.

Felli wanted to flee from her position as a Psychokinesist. If she did that, she could greet the end of her life without knowing anything, and when that time came, she'd probably have a ray of hope. But right now, it was a situation of half abandoning the city. Not knowing what was the most important. It hurt because she didn't report the fact. She had no way to accept this fact but agonized over it.

(You're worried!)

Felli stood up from the seat at the sudden voice. She was currently in an underground conference room. No second person was in this small and narrow

room. The dimmest light possible that came from the light of Psychokinesis in Felli's hair illuminated the tiny space.

The thing that gave off a light blue light was over there. A flake of Psychokinesis. A flake in the shape of a butterfly.



(Aa, did I scare you? I'm sorry! It's been a long while since I met someone with talent, so I'm a bit excited.)

It was the voice of an old woman. Felli had thought that it was Fermaus, but Fermaus' was an electric voice. Layfon had said that Fermaus had sustained heavy injury that had injured his throat.

"You are....." she said while supporting Layfon with Psychokinesis. She couldn't feel any hostility from the blue flake. If it was Fermaus, he would have triggered the Psychokinesis mine for an explosion, and Felli would have died.

Gentle ripples spread from the blue flake. An atmosphere of having tea together.

(Aa, sorry. I'm Delbone, Grendan's Psychokinesist.)

Grendan. Hearing that name was like having a bucket of cold water upended on her head. This person had managed to put a flake in here already. That was shocking.

(Ahhhhh, you don't have to be so confused. I won't do anything to you.)
Delbone said.

"What're you here for?"

(There's a girl that Her Majesty likes. She's in Zuellni, so we're here to retrieve her. In truth, this causes all sorts of trouble for other people! Reverse-san made a face of having eaten some foul worms.)

Delbone laughed. It was an elegant laugh.

Felli didn't know who Reverse was, but she knew this situation wasn't that relaxing.

(I already know your situation.) Delbone said.

Felli held her breath.

(Speaking of which, can you leave the situation to us? We won't do anything bad.)

"What? This isn't something I can decide on!"

(Then I'll be happy if you can introduce me to the person who is in charge of

things.)

This was now a negotiation between cities. Felli's flake sent the information to Karian.

(That's good. Do you have someone that you like?)

"..... Ha?" she reacted in confusion at the sudden change of topic.

(Someone that you like! No one else in Grendan has your talent. Besides, Psychokinesists aren't as confused and hesitant as Military Artists. Why? No. I think that's good, and it's something that can't be helped.)

"Excuse me. This isn't a question of why..... Why did you say that?"

(You're not giving up because of someone that you like! If you don't have that someone, then I can recommend you one. How about you come over to Grendan? I'm sure you can become an excellent Psychokinesist. If possible, you can even inherit my title, Quantis! I think it's about time for me to retire.)

"No, I'm not interested."

Not that she had heard of that name. She just thought that if there was a Psychokinesist holding the rank of Heaven's Blade, this person must be it.

(Aaaa, what a shame.) Delbone didn't stop the conversation. She just paused.

(So you do have someone that you like?)

She hadn't stopped asking.

"Well....."

For some reason, this steady and relaxing voice eased Felli. She was still supporting Layfon. His and Savaris's fight had become even more intense, and she and Fermaus kept on fighting. Right now, her brain was multi-tasking. The flake in the shape of a butterfly made her feel like she was relaxing under the sun.

(There must be many gentlemen that like you since you're so beautiful! But it's still better for you to choose the person yourself! You can't let the emotions sway you. Because your eyes are good, you must be more observant.)

"Ha....."

For some reason, she didn't know how to reply.

A part of her brain agreed with the conversation between Karian and Delbone. A part of Delbone's Psychokinesis was flowing through Felli's flake. She had only given up part of the territory. If she wanted, she'd take it back anytime. But if she did that, this old woman might take over her entire flake through some means that she knew nothing about. That possibility tensed her up. Since Delbone had begun a conversation with Karian, that probably meant that the conversation on this end had ended. But.....

(The person that you like isn't just someone that you can rely on. Speaking of which, of course he should be someone that you genuinely like.)

The old woman was still talking with Karian.

(But that isn't enough. It's the truth for anyone whether you're more independent or not. This isn't enough to make a good family.)

This wasn't an unbelievable topic, but Felli found it hard to understand. She could process complicated information at the same time, but she had never attempted speaking to two people simultaneously. This was like cutting one's emotions in half.

(Love is very important. You can't be too focused on just one side. Romance, on a certain level, is pretty good. What do you think when two people meet for the first time?)

Meaning she wanted to arrange a date for Felli.

"No, I....."

(Aaa, so you do have someone that you like? Then how about letting that person come live in Grendan? Isn't that a good environment for you?)

"No, uh..... That probably can't be done....."

(Aaa, what's wrong? Isn't this an Academy City? Two people might be separated? In that case, why not both move to Grendan?)

"No, uh....."

Why did she say his name here?

"Layfon, he....."

No, she said it! Her face heated.

(Ahhhhhhhhhhh)

She bent her body at Delbone's sigh.

Only thoughts kept running in the battlefield.



Delbone's other flake was in the reception room in Grendan's palace. As a reception room, the area wasn't that large. It was just a bit bigger than the room that Derek and Leerin were in before. Visitors did come from outside the city, but there weren't many of them. On the other hand, there were many businessmen who visited the palace, but they were usually taken to the other room since the talks were all private. Looking from the perspective of the royalty, this level of cheapness was something they could do nothing about. This was also the perspective of the builders of the palace.

All they needed was Military strength. That was what Grendan was.

In order to prevent the settling of dust, waterproof cloths covered the decorations in the room, including the place where the seat for the royalty was. The sofa in this room wasn't here before. The workers in the palace had carried it over quickly, but had put it at an angle. However, this way probably was the best judging from the looks of the people sitting on it.

"Next!" Alsheyra clapped, sitting on the luxurious single seat sofa.

Kanaris announced. "Quiet!"

"Time to go to war!"

Everyone reacted to the Queen's proclamation with complicated expressions. Only the Queen was excited about this. Delbone's flake was opposite Kanaris, emitting faint light. Tigris on the sofa, who sat the closest to the Queen, was fiddling with his beard. Kalvan grimaced next to him. Cauntia let Reverse sit on her laps, hugging him with joy – she hadn't taken in a single word at all.

Reverse's face was stiff because of the topic of war. Ruimei had taken over the sofa that was the furthest from the three. Troyatte sat on his own sofa and kicked away Ruimei's foot. Lintence walked away from his own sofa and started smoking near the window. Uh, this lazy style was still the same.

After confirming the situation with one glance, Alsheyra realized someone was missing.

"Where's Barmelin?"

(About that.....) Delbone reported, troubled. (She's sulking and is still in the shower.)

"Tell her I'll give her a blow if she doesn't come out. I'll get her to walk naked on the street!"

(Ahhhh.....) Her response was both relaxed and happy.

"About time to confirm the situation?" Kalvan suggested, still wearing a grimace.

"Yes, let's do it that way?"

Since Delbone's flake was with Barmelin, they didn't need to repeat the conversation.

The Queen glanced at Kanaris. She nodded and took a step forward.

"Right now, Grendan is heading for the Academy City, Zuellni."

"Ha?"

Not just one person. Disbelief showed on the people in the room. Lintence took down the cigarette in between his fingers and turned his head around.

"What a prank. Why did Grendan begin bullying the weak?" Tigris said, letting go of the beard that he was proud of.

"This is Grendan's wish."

Kanaris's expression remained calm, but she might hold doubts about Grendan's decision? What did Grendan want to do? Not a single person here could understand. No, Tigris probably understood, as did Savaris. Maybe even the first generation Luckens might know, but he wasn't here. Kanaris was

somehow related to the royalty, so she probably knew something. But all she knew was of the fate of the royalty and that it was meaningless if there weren't twelve Heaven's Blades. She didn't know anything beyond that. Delbone might have most of the information out of the Heaven's Blades here? But she had sealed off some of her knowledge. Knowledge was like electronic data for her. She probably could predict the future without surprise and shock at all.

All other Heaven's Blade successors showed incomprehension. No one knew what was happening. But it was about time to tell them about it!

"We're approaching the Academy City..... because there's war?" Kalvan asked. The job of asking was uninteresting, and it gained attention, but no one would do it but him. After all, Kalvan hated not being in control of the situation.

"Yes!"

"I see....." Now that he knew the situation, he was willing to agree with Grendan even if they were to fight against an Academy City.

"Hey, hey, don't end it like that!" Ruimei said with a rough voice. He bent a little and the sofa moaned. He was a person who could conquer the three-seater sofa. His foot bent upward and got in the way of Troyatte. He spread his tree trunk-like elbows.

"Is her Majesty getting us to play with kids? Don't joke around! I can't hold back. I won't be able to sleep fighting immature brats."

"I don't remember any adults entering a fight!" Troyatte said as he pushed away Ruimei's foot.

"Because I had yet to enter the fight."

"Then please look after me in any future fights! Yeah, you crownless King."

"Stop it. Shut up! Stop getting so noisy!" Alsheyra said, preventing Ruimei from standing up. His face was all red.

"It's not a problem to fight kids, but do you think I called you all here because of that?"

"And that's?"

Displeasure showed on Kalvan's countenance at yet another question.

Alsheyra looked away, her gaze landing on Lintence. He was smoking again as he looked back at her with his sharp eyes. His Kei was calm. Even though his gaze was anything but gentle, the Kei wasn't that intense. No, this situation was like this because the Heaven's Blades couldn't be still. Because they hadn't found a place that was stronger than them.

"Hell's begun!" Alsheyra announced in elation, as if she was singing.

"Hell's begun! What is hell like? The fight with it would make you regret living in this world. Today's fight is its beginning..... Delbone."

(Good, good. I've finished negotiating with the other side.)

Flakes moved to the middle of the room and projected an image.

"Oh?" Tigris said with interest.

The image showed a city empty of people. Empty of people, but something else was there. A strangely gargantuan person and some strange creatures. Numerous monsters were fighting, and they drowned the entire city. No one was in the city. Had they all gone to the shelters?

"Are they filth monsters?"

Some didn't think so. Here were brave souls who had obliterated a countless number of filth monsters, but they had never seen something like this before.

"They look similar but are different. They are more ancient than those things, as if they're the ancestors of the filth monsters."

"Uh.....?" Kalvan had an incredulous look on his face, but Alsheyra ignored him. They couldn't escape from them whether they understood, not understood, agreed or not agreed with her. Whether you were born in Grendan or not, here they were the Heaven's Blade successors. No one could escape from the time when that event occurred. This was like the fate of those Military Artists who stood on the top of the pyramid. How were Military Artists born? How was this world formed? Would they agree with her if they knew the reasons? But she didn't want to explain those things. It'd take too long.

"Delbone, how long till contact?"

(About two more hours. Looks like those kids will arrive at 10pm.)

"Ah~ speaking of which, didn't Savaris receive a secret order and head out? Isn't that city his destination?" Ruimei tapped his palm with his huge fist. Everyone showed displeasure at the noise he made.

"Seems so, but he's got an additional mission to protect the princess..... That guy, dragging his feet and playing around! I'll peel off his skin if anything happened."

He then realized everyone's gazes had gathered, pointing their fingers and looking elsewhere. Only Lintence still had his attention on him.

Barmelin had arrived. She exuded dissatisfaction. Alsheyra ignored her as before. Time to change the mood.

"Then we'll contact the other city in two hours....." she looked at the Heaven's Blades here.

"Ruimei, Troyatte, you two go and make a commotion over there. You can destroy anything but the underground facilities. That's precious!"

"Heh!"

"Roger!"

"Delbone, search for the princess's location. Once you find her, Barmelin is to open the way. Lintence, you're to protect the princess. You can do whatever within that area."

"Why me.....?"

"Because you're the most suitable to meet her! And everyone else stops the invader at the contact point. Well, though I don't think that would help."

Lintence's brow moved in disapproval, but his thought quickly turned to somewhere else.

He might meet it.

That was ten years ago. He himself was that tall back then. His growth in Kei had now stopped. He wished for his hour to end if possible. He himself had lived too long.

She felt the massive amount of Kei when the roaming bus neared. She

thought an interesting guy had come – and she was dissatisfied with the Kei around her. It wouldn't bring her wonderful battles. Why was she born into this world? Why had she kept on living? These questions floated out one after another. Before, she had never thought of these questions. She knew from the moment of awareness that she was Alsheyra, the person who stood on the top of Grendan, the person who had to prepare for the impending battle. That was why the blood couldn't weaken. It could only become denser. The three royal families continued that tradition. As if to challenge the current phenomenon, they married within the families, making them the unusual group from the world. The three royal families inherited the strongest blood among the Heaven's Blades as they were careful to keep their blood line pure. And in the end, Alsheyra was born. She knew why she was born, and that was why she was interested in this man, this man who knew the reason behind her power.

She came to the outer suburb and saw him on the opposite wall. He walked out of the roaming bus with displeasure on his face. The long coat was torn and damaged through its long journey, but it suited that man. In him was a sense of loneliness that Alsheyra didn't have. So she wanted to hit him.

The man acted, instinctively releasing a small amount of Kei. He had chosen an area on the outskirts that few people ever went to. The match started immediately. Invisible small threads surrounded Alsheyra. Steel threads. Just the weapon itself had enormous killing power, and on top of that was the large amount of Kei. Even other Heaven's Blade successors couldn't match his level of Kei. Even though he had been on a long journey, he had lots of battle experience. His consciousness as he threw in his Kei was clearer and more intense than anyone else. It seemed it was a good thing that he had come to Grendan.

But this level of Kei could not harm Alsheyra. She caught the Steel threads and walked ahead like it was a matter of fact, then she hit that man's face. With an unbelievable expression, he flew from her. This man needed hell. The cruelest and hottest hell. For this man to come to Grendan must be a sign heralding the coming of that hell. She took hold of his hair, pulled him up and looked at his face. He had dense hair and his pupils were deep. His gaze called for battle. He must have caused unneeded chaos in other cities, but in Grendan,

this gaze was needed.

"I'll show you, show you to feel regret for living in the battle of this world."

She had promised him and that promise would definitely come true.

It was now about to be fulfilled. They had only two more hours till hell.

The Heaven's Blade Successors left the room after receiving their orders. She got rid of Kanaris too. Though Delbone might still be around, Alsheyra decided to ignore her. She didn't want to send her away even though she could do it. Delbone was essential to Grendan.

Lintence was still smoking by the window. The ash tray that a maid had given him had ashes heaped in it like a small mountain.

"Go and look at your battlefield!"

"..... Uh," he stood up and shook off the ashes stuck to his coat. This coat was different from the one he wore when they first met. A Heaven's Blade Successor's life was rich, but this coat wasn't made of any expensive and good material. This guy had no luck with clothes. It was his style to sustain the mood of battle.

Alsheyra buried her head in the sofa in a room empty of other souls. High spirit covered her. At the same time, pain surrounded her.

-Leerin.

Alsheyra had dragged her into this hell. The family that had inherited the blood of Airen Garfield.



A figure stood in the courtyard of the palace. He took off his loose clothes and revealed his body. Bright sunlight burnt his skin. The beautiful skin didn't match his age. Beneath the skin stood out hard and powerful muscles.

He was Tigris. The Queen and Kanaris came here a few days ago. He didn't

know what the Queen was doing. He also didn't know that the Queen had been looking at Zuellni from here. At that time, he was facing Zuellni, practicing his bow. At present, even normal people could see the Academy City, and the citizens had headed for the shelters. Evacuation was about to be complete. The dry noises of Grendan's movement shook the air. Tigris pulled his bow string back. This string was made of metal. It wasn't a Steel Thread, but if one couldn't master it, one might have his finger cut off and thrown away.

He pulled the string back. No arrow. A Military Artist would use his own Kei as the arrow. Right now, he had yet to let his Kei run. External Kei and Internal Kei slept in him. He just used his own strength to pull the bow string. This wasn't something that a normal aged elder could do.

(Your skill's gone rusty.)

It was Delbone.

"If it's gone rusty, how can I be pulling this? But my naivety back then might have caused today's state!"

This wasn't the gentle grandpa way of speaking back in the reception room. He was more blunt and detailed now. The unease in his heart was one reason behind his change of demeanor. Of course, this was also because he had been matching Delbone for a long time.

(Do you think so?)

"Yes. Well~ It matters not if that guy Herder ran away. No matter how strong a person is, it's meaningless if his heart is weak and lazy. If it's better for him to think he doesn't have that blood in him, I'd have raised my hands in agreement for him to choose to flee. But....."

He recalled that event from 16 years ago. That event named Meifar Stadt.

At that time, Tigris was also in the courtyard. This was the best place to gaze down at the entire city. The worms made a commotion in the outer area. A filth monster had shown up in the facility. Military Artists had already surrounded it. Tigris only needed to wait for the result. However, he wasn't waiting for the report on the filth monster. He was waiting for something else. Something else

that had been going on for a while.

(Tigris.)

Delbone's flake spoke. This flake was made up of many flakes. Delbone was very busy right now. She was distracting the investigation of the filth monster by other Psychokinesists. She had to let them know what was happening while simultaneously covering up the information they were not supposed to know. Only she could do both things at once.

(Half is success, but half is failure.)

"No need to deliver the failure!"

Everything was as expected? That didn't exist in this world. Tigris understood that point well. But how had they failed? He felt uneasy as long as he didn't know why.

(Herder-sama has died, and what he held was all destroyed. His daughter lives, but she's just a baby. It's not possible for anyone to enter that place again.)

Herder had fled to the roaming bus facility, his plan beautifully designed. Everyone knew he had a woman outside, but no one knew she was pregnant. And then came the sudden death. Why? Tigris didn't understand Herder's actions at first. Did he fear his fiancé Alsheyra's jealousy? But he should already know that Alsheyra had no such feelings. She wasn't interested in him at all. So he was dissatisfied and went to hook up with a woman outside. No one would blame him for that. As long as he didn't fight for the crown, him having a baby with that woman didn't pose a problem either. The royal family didn't care for a guy whose blood was thin like a normal person. But then why did he have to escape? Being Herder, he should have already understood that.

Something icy pierced his body as he followed his train of thought. Could it be..... His body shook. Tigris immediately opened communication with Delbone and sent the direction to the Rivin family. The Rivin family was famous for their secret movements. It was a family that was responsible for the darker side of governance. No one needed to explain the reason. An assassin was sent and Herder died.

(What should we do? The mother has the child, and she's also hurt. If we don't do anything, she'd die.)

Tigris observed the outer area with the vision of a Military Artist. Nothing much had changed, and he couldn't see the movement of the filth monster. But Delbone said that the filth monster had appeared as if to protect Herder. It had come into being, morphed from a normal person.

What was going on? Was it their work? They got ahead of them? But this sign was too weak. Was it just a filth monster in its aged phase? So strange a situation. Delbone had said the filth monster was in the shape of a human. But its power paled in comparison to a filth monster in its aged phase.

Was it really that? In that, that thing wasn't a filth monster? Or had it even thought of using a filth monster?

Things changed while he was hesitating. Someone had dashed into the facility. Tigris had seen him before. It was the Head of a small school called Psyharden. Derek Psyharden. Had he found something unusual? No, someone who believed in his own instinct would not take note of a Psychokinesist's report. He must hold the position of a platoon captain. This meant he was strong. He might have noticed something that didn't match the Psychokinesist's report. So he had gone inside to confirm with his own eyes?

Tigris thought Derek's action was worthy of praise. But at the same time, his heart was heavy and pained. His bow was ready. The Kei had formed into an arrow.

(Are you going to kill him?)

"He's a Military Artist, but his blood is lacking. The existence of the weak is what makes up this world. If this thing was found out, great misfortune would befall us."

(There might not be a second chance.)

"Even so, the time is here. Even if I'm to die fighting, that point won't change."

Delbone hesitated. Without her aid, he could not guarantee the arrow would hit its target even if it pierced the wall of the facility. Was he to destroy the

facility? There was a chance that that person might live through the explosion. If Tigris used his full strength, a part of the outer suburb would disappear. But what if he failed to eliminate it even with his full power?

"Delbone, how will he die? Eaten by a filth monster or killed by me? You choose!"

When he realized it, he had already said something very naive. He felt he was getting old, and he would appear very much to be in his age. But he had felt till now that he couldn't live like that. Something must still happen in his lifetime. Then he must not die yet. Even though he was old, he must keep up with his body and psychological condition.

"Delbone," he called again.

The flake fell silent, and then she said in a small voice....

(We'll gamble on that Military Artist, Tigris.)

"What did you say?"

That Military Artist had already entered the facility. Tigris heard the sound of fighting, which didn't last long. Silence descended again.

(Can that Military Artist protect the child? If he has the strength, he'll save her. I think something might happen.)

"You're soft!"

He lowered the bow as the Kei arrow dissipated. But he kept his vision and watched the facility with murderous intent.

"But this isn't bad! To die here or to witness the last arena? If I'm to choose, I'll make a choice!"

Just who was luckier..... The question turned meaningless. Tigris shook his head.

In the end, the baby lived.

"I still think that it's dead," Tigris had said when he pulled back the arrowless

bow. His gaze was on Zuellni, the place that Alsheyra had called hell. That baby was still living. How did she grow up? As a normal person, she would have grown up normally, worked, experienced romance, and given birth to the next generation. That was the life she was supposed to live if only Military Artists did not exist in this world! But Tigris had once lowered his bow and did not raise it against the girl. Not because Delbone had won but because he was also human. Although he was a Military Artist in the royal family, he was also human. He couldn't kill a small child who wasn't even his enemy.

(Even so, I know that child is happy.)

"Then, aren't things going to turn less fortunate?"

For one who didn't know happiness, she wouldn't know what misfortune was like. Tigris had wanted to say that, but Delbone's laughter changed the mood and he decided to stay silent.

"Grandpa."

Tigris lowered his bow at the sound behind him. His granddaughter was standing at the entrance of the courtyard.

"What is it, Claribel?"

"The Military Artists are moving. What's going on....."

His granddaughter liked to keep to a young image. Well, she did have a beautiful body. The legs underneath her armor were slim and her skin sparkled with life. The colors of her hair were unusual. A thread of white, naturally born so, was mixed in with her long black hair.



"Why don't you ask your cousin?"

The Queen was such an existence to Tigris' granddaughter.

"I don't like to! She said I don't pass!" she pouted with her lips peeled back.

He laughed. This expression suited her. She really was a girl.

"Compared to that, I can see what's outside. It's an Academy City but it has filth monsters. Has that got something to do with Grendan's movement?"

"As long as we know of filth monster's existences, Grendan only has one thing in mind."

"But this is another city!"

"No matter where the filth monsters are, Grendan will go and hunt them down."

His granddaughter left with incomprehension.

(Your granddaughter has become strong.)

"Not at all. Compared to Layfon....."

(That child is still living there.)

A pained expression showed on Tigris' face.

(Aren't we going to give her the Heaven's Blade?)

"Perhaps I'm an idiot, but better give her something bitter to chew on! She still hasn't tasted failure, being all so arrogant still!"

One Heaven's Blade remained empty without an owner – Wolfstein, the title that Layfon once held. It was too early to give it to Tigris' granddaughter. She had not the strength to stand out from other Military Artists. Alsheyra hadn't given the title to another yet, and she hadn't held any other Heaven's Blade matches. That was why Claribel was dissatisfied.

(We need twelve Heaven's Blades, but we won't make that for this battle.)

"Why must it be twelve? I don't get why!" he said honestly as he eyed Zuellni.

He probably would know soon enough.

Chapter 4: The City of Spirits

Just what had happened? No one here could understand, but they were sure that something had happened. Groups of invading filth monsters had taken over parts of Zuellni, but those filth monsters were fighting each other. They didn't seem like they were allies. The presence of the enemies was enough to seep through Nina's entire body, making her grit her teeth.

A name had come from the flake – Delbone, Grendan's messenger.

Karian had kept a flake to communicate with Felli, and that person's voice had come through that flake.

"We'll take care of the filth monsters on the ground. Please rest at ease."

The old woman's peaceful voice dispelled the ruckus in the room, a voice from heaven that exuded a relaxing breath to ease off the tension. Her words comforted them. In fact, Zuellni's Military Artists were at their limit. To be attacked in the middle of an intercity match..... Many had been injured. No one had died yet, but the number of Military Artists sustaining heavy injuries was on the rise.

They were saved! Relief showed on the faces of the members of the Student Council around Karian. But Karian himself held a complex expression. Nina was the same. Grendan's aim was the Haikizoku. The city might have other goals, but they were sure at least that the Haikizoku was its main goal. Judging from the action of the Mercenary Gang, Grendan's movements were all about retrieving the Haikizoku. Right now, no one knew where it was, though. It was originally in Nina's body, but it had gone somewhere. It might have abandoned Nina to possess another person. In that case, what would Grendan do when it realized it couldn't reach its goal? Or, what would Karian do if the Haikizoku had possessed yet another student of Zuellni? But Delbone hadn't mentioned the Haikizoku, and Nina didn't feel the old woman had any other aim. The

negotiation was all about eliminating filth monsters. The Psychokinesist had left right after the conversation.

Karian watched the screen on the ground, projected by the Psychokinesist.

"What's happening?" he said in a small voice. This was reality but no one knew what it was. Karian called over the Head of Alchemy. This was his first time meeting him. He already knew his name, but he couldn't imagine what the other person looked like.

"This is that, isn't it?"

"I can only think so. It's a guardian beast."

"Guardian beast?" Nina cocked her head, but then she remembered.

Before Nina entered Zuellni, the students of the Alchemy course were researching on a project that got cancelled later – the Guardian Beast project. In a strange event that Felli got caught in, she had been attacked by these monsters, but Nina didn't see it as she arrived late to the scene. So it was a Guardian Beast? Looking from the function of a Guardian Beast, it was a monster with the body of a worm. Right now, this group of Guardian Beasts was attacking a giant.

"So they were hiding in a place that we didn't know? So many of them too?"

"Impossible! We did a thorough check of the city when the city's base collapsed. We would've found such a place if it existed."

"We did not investigate the underground maze though!"

Members of the Student Council said to each other.

"But a facility that can sustain so many lives needs energy! Why didn't we find out about that....." The Head of Alchemy said, thinking.

"Karian, there's a place I want to confirm."

"If possible, I want to go too!"

Some secret information flowed between Karian and the Head of Alchemy.

"But that place isn't connected to the shelter. We'll have to return to the ground."

"No problem."

The Head of Alchemy was a very thin man, but enthusiasm and passion filled his eyes. He wasn't scared of the outside at all.

"We need guards. Military Artists. Psychokinesists..... I want a platoon for this, but we don't have any that is intact. We must choose."

Karian adjusted his glasses. "Contact Vance. Since Grendan's going to eliminate the filth monsters, we can arrange some elites to be guards."

Vance came over quickly, bringing with him Gorneo and Shante. Karian walked with Vance a distance away from Nina and the rest of the people in the room before they spoke.

"Are you all right?"

On the other side, Gorneo was observing the situation.

"Grendan is here."

"What did you say!?" Gorneo said.

Bandages were wrapped around Gorneo's head. Blood showed on the bandages. He was surprised.

"Just what is the Haikizoku that makes that city come all the way here?"

"I'm not sure of the exact details, but Grendan is looking for the power that the Haikizoku possesses."

"You mean Grendan's government?"

"No..... Grendan itself," Gorneo shook his head. "Only few people in Grendan know of this. Originally, even the Luckens family shouldn't have known since they're not connected to the royal family. No, I myself didn't want to believe a Haikizoku existed, so I don't remember where I heard of this from."

Vance and Karian were still talking. They seemed to have gotten stuck over something in their discussion. It appeared some time was needed till they made the final decision!

"Grendan is a Haikizoku."

"What!?" she couldn't comprehend, but he didn't look like he was lying.

"It does things that other cities wouldn't do. Have I not thought of this before? I did, but I gave it up, thinking it was too ridiculous an idea. But that is the reality. Grendan is a Haikizoku!"

Yes, she remembered. When she saw Savaris in Myath. Leerin had had an encounter, then Savaris had shown up. What did he say? He said.....

"The real consciousness....."

"Is there another Electronic Fairy in Grendan?"

"I've heard of it, but only the royal family knows. Only the Luckens family is left from the first generation of Heaven's Blades."

He didn't look proud of that fact, but why was he telling her of this so easily?

"I'm Zuellni's Military Artist. Even if I'm to return to Grendan, I'm still Zuellni's," he said honestly. "I'll stand before Grendan if it has bad intentions towards Zuellni..... Even I can fight against some of them."

A kind of tragic emotion was in his words, but in the next second...

"Ah!" Gorneo's head turned. Shante had suddenly leaped to sit on his shoulders. Her legs encircled his neck as she pulled on his short golden hair.

"Don't worry! We'll beat them up!"

"You're too naive!"

"Don't think so much. We just need to beat up our enemies."

Shante's quick words helped Nina relax her expression. Gorneo looked funny with his troubled expression. He was speaking to himself in a tiny voice.

Karian and Vance had finally come to a conclusion. Nina, Sharnid, Gorneo and Shante were to guard Karian and the Head of Alchemy. They went back to the surface and headed for their destination. Vance stayed in the shelter in case anything happened.

"Just us?"

Only four people. Too few to protect the key members of Zuellni's Student Council in a danger zone.

"The captain-level Military Artists are all unable to fight except for you four."

"What a terrible situation!"

This was the painful truth. Nina herself might have shown her shock if Sharnid hadn't voiced his out first. She swallowed her words. This wasn't a usual time. No time to get surprised at every little thing.

"For those who don't want to rest, they'll never rest. We must carefully observe and confirm those who force themselves."

This was the reason that Vance had to stay back. His expression had always been bad, and now he looked even worse. His team was the first to fight the first wave of larvae. He fought while commanding all the other Military Artists. He probably hadn't gotten any sleep.

Nina's wrists hurt. She had received treatment but they hadn't entirely healed. However, she could now ignore the pain. Gorneo and Shante both had bandages on them. Sharnid was the only person unhurt, but his eyes were red. His vision must be overworked for having to do so much precision shooting. He had used eye drop medicine countless times, but he still rubbed his eyes occasionally.

"Can we safely arrive there?" Sharnid looked at the ceiling and applied some eye drops again.

The Psychokinesist had turned the sky into a map. Vance began the explanation.

"You're to leave from the E1 exit. There's a distance to the destination from E1, but that area has the fewest number of filth monsters. If the enemies come over to check the situation by sense of smell, our Psychokinesists will create a magnetic barrier to control the flow of the wind, but that won't affect their vision."

"So we're to move tentatively!" Sharnid joked.

Vance nodded. "Yes. It's best if you don't get found out. We still don't know the enemy's strength. We don't know whether four injured birds can defeat them. In the long term, these things are gathering, fighting and consuming each other. We must use this chaos to our advantage and head for our destination."

"Isn't it better to stay here and wait for Grendan's help?" Gorneo asked.

Karian answered. "We still don't know their aim. With this situation, even Zuellni itself might become problematic."

"You mean the City's Electronic Fairy?"

"Yes," he nodded heavily.

Nina tensed at the possibility of something happening to Zuellni. She didn't know what Karian was planning, but she couldn't let this go if it was connected to the Electronic Fairy.

"This is the temporary route. Everyone, remember it. Got it? Then go!" Vance said.

They walked through a passage in the shelter. The aroma of food wafted to them. This was the canteen, and many students were inside, mostly women. They were probably making meals for Military Artists. The usual food eaten in a shelter was food that could last long, and this food was being cooked in the kitchen.

"We can rest a bit and eat some hot food," Karian said.

Nina saw Leerin in the canteen. The other girl had also noticed her. Nina was a bit surprised. Once the two of them got close to each other, questions surfaced. Nina's expression was dull, but that was normal for this situation. But Leerin was still bothered.

"What is it?"

"I have a mission," she replied vaguely.

Leerin looked at them. "Wait a moment." She entered the canteen and came back with a bag of stuff.

"If you're in a hurry, eat this on the way."

Sandwiches and soup in paper cups sat in the bag.

"Thanks."

Though she wasn't hungry, she realized she hadn't eaten a thing for a long time. Nina took the bag with gratitude.

"Are you all right?"

Leerin smiled. "Yeah, I'm fine!"

But it still worried her. Leerin's attitude was the same as when Nina talked to her childhood friend. Bluffing. But there was a reason behind that attitude. She had wanted to make a carefree expression but had failed. Whose heart was more knotted? But there was no time to investigate further. Gorneo was calling her. She ran with the bag in her hand.

"Leerin, remember to see a doctor if your eye hurts!"

Leerin looked surprised. Her eye had not opened again.

Nina ran, hoping it wasn't something serious. Layfon wasn't here, and this fact surprised her. She had always believed he was here, and pain cut through her when she thought of that. What would happen to her if she didn't think this way? The soup in her mouth flowed warmth into her body.

A different air hit their nostrils the moment they left the shelter through the door. As expected, this air differed from the purified air in the shelter and the dust-filled air when fighting the larvae. The sky had turned dark. No moon or stars could be seen, as if a thick cloud cover had shrouded the entire sky. Electricity had been cut off from some parts of the ground. Everywhere was dim and gloomy. Only the faint emergency lights on the streets led their way.

The sound of clashing filled the air. Filth monsters roared. But there was still some distance between the enemies and the students. Though they could fall from the sky, the number did not seem to have increased. Compared to that, the sound that had been enveloping the entire city was more stimulating. A regular rumbling brought along a bad premonition. The sound of Grendan's multi-legs.

"Let's hurry!"

How could they let the Head of the Alchemy walk ahead of them? Gorneo and Shante headed the small group. Nina and Sharnid took up the rear, and the rest were protected in the middle. Shante had strong night vision. She could see the path even without light. That ability must be innate! On the other hand, Gorneo had chosen to walk close to the emergency lights. Shante looked left and right to check whether anything had closed in on them.

The route remained unchanged. Vance's strategy to change the flow of the wind through a magnetic barrier might have been effective.

Nina was observing her surroundings, and so did Sharnid, but they didn't feel anything getting near. What was this? She was undergoing a mission, and it was the same with the city. This wasn't something simple. Things were developing while she was still in the dark. Just like the literal darkness surrounding them now. For Nina's group, they could see only very little, so they had to do all they could to survive.

Something big was happening. Would Zuellni survive? Unease continued to plague her. What about the Haikizoku? Did Grendan come just to defeat filth monsters? Not because of the Haikizoku? What would they do when Grendan realized it had failed? If that happened, Nina could only give up her body. Grendan's people didn't know how the Haikizoku worked, and Nina had deceived them. What would the situation be when they realized they had been lied to? She better take that possibility into consideration too.

"You're thinking of something again?" Sharnid asked in a small voice.

"You think simply. I can guess from that," he said to the surprised Nina as he looked around. "You're thinking of using yourself for the exchange, right? Stop that thinking! No one would be happy if you do that."

"But....."

"Layfon's forcing himself and being reckless!"

Nina was confused at his words.

"Why's he doing that? That's important. Since he understands Grendan, then he shouldn't move recklessly! But he was like that when you weren't here."

He meant when she was in Myath. Recalling herself back then, Nina looked at Karian. He was following Gorneo. It appeared he hadn't heard them.

He had said to her before her return that Karian didn't think it possible for Layfon to fight without a reason. Hence, Layfon was only following Nina's reason for fighting, and he was doing that even now! They had to fight because they were Military Artists. But that matter-of-fact reason for Nina did not work for Layfon. He was too strong, and his birthplace was too different. He had

things he wanted to protect. He betrayed to protect the people precious to him and then he was tossed away. Was she to draw that Layfon into battle? Was she the one who drew him in? She had asked herself numerous times, and so she confirmed her answer again and again. She could only ask him for his power. No one else had the power to handle the task.

"True. As a Military Artist, he really is too strong, so strong that we find it hard to stomach. He surpasses all of us. He's always acted clueless and clumsy, but he's entirely different when he fights. But how should he fight? – He never thinks of that. As long as he's set his goal, he'd probably fight even if the outcome would be defeat. That's what I think."

"That guy knows."

Layfon really was different when he trained. As long as it was something that had to do with Military Arts, he'd become sharp and cold. People found it hard to like him when he was like that. He was saying clearly to the weaker people that they were weak. He had walked through many intense battles. He had obtained a Heaven's Blade at the age of ten. From then on, no, he had been fighting filth monsters before that. What was Nina doing before age ten? She didn't yet have her own Dite. But Layfon had already stepped into the battlefield, had already started facing the cruel and cold reality. To let him fight was foolishness. Unbelievable. But Sharnid thought differently.

He sighed, "Oi, if he really understood, he wouldn't have come here."

She couldn't make a retort. Layfon had always been fighting for the orphanage. What a Military Artist earned could sustain the operation of the orphanage, but he thought it wasn't enough. He wanted to protect all the orphans in Grendan, so he participated in underground matches and consequently was exposed. A person who was a hero was not a hero in reality. Nina couldn't reproach the orphans who thought they had been betrayed. Probably even Nina herself would have condemned him like them if she was there. Sharnid was right. There might be another reason. It probably wasn't what Nina said before about his spirit, but just a more practical way to make up for his deeds in the past.

Layfon had said that he wanted to kill, but he didn't end up killing. He had the

chance to kill the guy who threatened him, but he failed. Something must have stopped him. The orphans looked at him as a hero. They might have been in his mind and had stopped him – Nina thought so. But perhaps he couldn't kill him because the screen didn't manage to hide them. If the trend went the majority's way, then he couldn't kill Gahard even in broad daylight. Anyway, something must have gone wrong. That was what she thought.

"That guy's probably the same as you! He doesn't really think about the problem. To him, it's a mistake, if he doesn't face it..... You guys don't think over things, so you never change. Because you never think of whether the fight benefits you or not."

"I don't think I'm doing this for myself, besides, with me here....."

"If you really think you understand, then we ought to celebrate!"

She could only fall silent. They were now at a distance from Karian and the rest. They wanted to talk about deeper things, but this situation didn't allow them. Sharnid understood that and didn't say anything more.

They walked some distance. Still no filth monsters, but they could hear the sound of fights. And the sound of Grendan's movement was getting louder. The sound came from the direction of the Student Council building, so it was opposite from where they were. Though they couldn't see the thing on the other side, they could feel the darkness deepening.

Nina and her group walked a long circle to come to the Student Council building. The sound was close. She could tell the location of Grendan even if she didn't want to know of it. She could see Karian's face had turned stiff, but the Head of Alchemy seemed all right. He just kept moving ahead as if he was impatient for not being able to move according to plan. The clock tower that was the symbol of the Student Council emerged from the darkness. The digits on the clock shone. Light emitted from them so anyone could see them anytime. They were about to step on the path that led to the clock tower.

Shante took a step on the path, shrouded by the shadows of the trees, and stopped. The path was wide, covered by fallen leaves. The building that hid deep in a distance where the path led to was where that event had happened. The event that Felli got caught in.

Shante suddenly lowered her body, holding her spear and stared behind Nina.
(One's heading your way.)

The Psychokinesist's report was a bit late.

A huge shadow accompanied by the sound of wood splitting headed for Nina.

"It's here!" Karian said.

"Nina, you cover for the Student President. I'll stop it with Shante!" Gorneo said.

Shante raised the spear. The Kei on the weapon had already painted her hair red, as if she were being burnt.

"But....."

"No time for discussion! Go!!"

The Head of Alchemy was already running for the building.

"Don't die," Karian called.

"As if?"

Nina chased after Karian. Roaring shook the entire forest. Trees fell one after another. Shante shouted and Kei exploded one by one. Nina turned her head around and kept running after the Student President. Sharnid had already reached the entrance and had readied his sniper rifle.

"Hurry and support them!" Nina thought but didn't say it. They couldn't afford to draw attention. Sharnid understood too and hadn't pulled the trigger.

Once she entered the building, Sharnid followed.

It was dark inside, but Karian and the Head of Alchemy kept forging ahead. The Psychokinesist didn't know what danger lurked before them, so he moved with caution. Finally they reached the end of the building. The Head of Alchemy touched the wall, and another space opened before them.

"A false door!" Sharnid whistled.

"This is a secret research facility," Karian said.

"I see?"

Nina looked ahead, but there was no light around them. She couldn't see anything.

"Zuellni's been researching about something that came out of the Guardian Beast project. But we haven't fully investigated it."

Karian followed the Head of Alchemy into the darkness. Darkness felt like water. Once she stepped into this area, Nina felt something resisting her, and her breathing became slightly difficult. She had thought that maybe the air wasn't good in here, but she felt that couldn't be the reason.

Darkness filled Zuellni. Filth monsters conquered the surface, and the mysterious things that they fought against were here, as well as the ever closing in Grendan. The pressure that Nina felt before entering this hidden space was different from the pressure she bore now. The term "monster" surfaced in her mind. Darkness conquered Zuellni, yet the darkness here had been living within Zuellni since long ago.

Finally, something that could suppress the darkness – faint green light. The darkness was close to the source of the light, but they didn't seem to touch. Was the darkness a creature? She thought of that and was shocked at what she saw.

The source of the light was in the shape of a large container, and liquid filled its inside. This thing was emitting green light. The glass container was similar to the medical facility used to take care of heavily injured patients. No, this was probably a medical facility.

The Head of Alchemy took a step forward and stood, silent. Karian couldn't see the glass because of him, so he stepped to a side and then saw it.

"..... What is this?" Nina said. Karian was also silent. Sharnid, who used to joke around, also didn't say a word.

A very beautiful young girl was sleeping in the container. A girl with black hair and white skin. Naked, but the green liquid had covered most of her body. Her beauty was indescribable.

"Ha, hahaha..... It's all right. It's all right!" The Head of Alchemy laughed, as

if something had possessed him.

Nina looked at him, feeling something terrifying was beside her.

"Student President, this is....."

No matter how she looked at it, this girl looked like a scientific sample.

"It is true that a failed experiment during the Guardian Beast project had caused an explosion," Karian said.

Nina looked at him. For some reason, she could see him now. It was difficult to move her gaze away from the girl.

"According to the records, the explosion had heavily damaged the underground energy net. The energy hadn't run away on a rampage, but it has remained here and become like this."

"This is....."

"A part of Zuellni. An Electronic Fairy. That was the conclusion of the researchers back then. She's been sleeping and she has a body, but the structure of the body differs from a normal human's. The researchers had concluded that it's made of a high level magnetic field, but they're not sure of the exact details."

Meaning this girl was Zuellni? But she looked different. A question floated past Nina. If this girl was part of Zuellni, then that question would definitely surface again.

When Falnir fled, it had communicated with Zuellni. No one knew what they said. But something had been decided, and Zuellni had grown. No person in existence knew of how an Electronic Fairy grew. Even Nina, who grew up in Sheniebel, didn't know. The growth of an Electronic Fairy probably denoted the city was in possession of something. If that was the hypothesis, then what did Zuellni's growth represent? A growth stage? Or had she just returned to her original form? If it was the latter, then what did it mean to regain what had been lost? But, but.....

Nina looked at the girl in the container again. Dizziness assaulted her head. It hurt. She realized she might have seen this girl before. It might just be her

imagination, but that feeling remained. She had seen her somewhere. Yes, in Myath. To her, the entirety of what was unbelievable all came to her when she was in Myath. Since her mysterious encounter with Dixerio, she had touched the other end of his fate, and that had in turn changed her fate. What was going on? She still didn't get it. A force of darkness was inside her, but it might be part of the darkness that now shrouded Zuellni.

What did she see in Myath? Was this thing in Myath too? Not really. Just her imagination? But something unbelievable existed. She had to remember it quick. Since everything happened so quickly, she might have missed something. Something. Something?

Leerin.

That named surfaced in her mind. She and Leerin went to deliver the Electronic Fairy back to the Mechanical Department, and the Wolf Faces had interfered. Nina was rendered immobile because of the Haikizoku losing control..... What had happened at that time? Something had calmed the Haikizoku down. Something was behind Leerin. Savaris had called it "the true consciousness".

But why was Nina recalling that now? Because she talked about it with Gorneo in the shelter? Because she wished to connect everything? She must remember what she saw at that moment.

"What?" The Head of Alchemy said.

Everyone reacted. Nina raised her iron whips. But the sound of Gorneo fighting from the outside couldn't reach here.

The change occurred in the glass container. The Head of Alchemy stared at the measurement, and he looked as if he had been hit. What did the change in number on the measurement mean? Nina didn't understand. But his action told her it wasn't something good.

Numerous bubbles emerged in the glass container and the girl opened her eyes.

"She's awake. No way....." Karian said.

The Head of Alchemy trembled.

The girl moved. Her hand touched the glass. In the next moment, all light vanished, but the green light came back straight afterwards.

The girl was missing. The Head of Alchemy gave off a shrill shout and fell back onto the ground. Karian also fell as if he had lost his strength. Sharnid was the same.

Nothing happened to Nina.

"As I thought, it's better to return to my original body. Good timing that you're here. Oh, shadow. It really isn't something that other people can use! I didn't like that at all!"

Where did the voice come from?

Nina looked around. Sharnid had fallen. A force of darkness that could suppress the green light was here. A face emerged from it.

"First time meeting you, little girl."

The girl.

"You are....."

"Nelphilia, that was what people called me. No one calls me that now, but since that's the only name I have, call me Nelphilia then," she said in a joking way.

And her words seemed to suck Nina in.

"Your name?"

"..... Nina."

Hang in there. Nina encouraged herself. If she relaxed here, she'd be drawn in. That beauty was dangerous. The lightly dancing figure with her eyes opened was so beautiful.

The girl wasn't naked now. She wore black clothes. She walked over to her. Her dress swayed. The darkness seemed to sway with her too.

The ground shook, and then the entire place trembled.

Nelphilia lifted her head to look above her.

"The thing that controls the shadow is finally here!" she said.

The giant had seen it. The sensing organs in its chest flashed, only the face with the mouth looked up like a human's action. A gigantic ball-like thing floated within the darkness. It saw it, or perhaps it felt it, and then it moved. That was the only thing the giant could do.

The next moment, that thing hit the giant's chest. The impact exploded against the giant's chest. Bones shattered and muscles flew apart. Cracks spidered down the giant's entire body. The giant fell.

Countless number of thorns stood from the ball-like thing, and it was connected to a chain. The chain stretched to the outside of the city where a certain huge shape was.

A large metal ball and a long chain.

Loud noise sounded from Zuellni's ground. Next, a huge man appeared next to the metal ball. He was shorter than the giant, but he was a giant by human standard. Zuellni's "huge men" were Gorneo and Vance, but those two paled into insignificance beside this man.

Ruimei Garrand MacRing. That was this man's name.

"Ahah?" Ruimei looked underneath the metal ball. Liquid spurted from the giant. Dissatisfaction pushed his brows together. The sound of rumbling called in more giants, but he ignored them.

"What? So weak! Is this hell? She sent me out so grandly. Did I mistake her meaning? Or was she dizzy from sleep? No, hasn't she been acting like the fool often too?"

The giant's body shivered beneath the metal ball. It was regenerating. The previous strike had not finished it. But Ruimei didn't move away.

"Look! It's not like I haven't been out! This way, even that Kalvan's foul face would look shocked?"

He stepped on the chest of the giant casually. He didn't seem to be using any strength in his foot, but the chest of the giant shattered. Sensory organs broke

with the sound of glass breaking. The giant struggled and fell still.

"Stop moving, you worm."

He stepped on the face that only had a mouth on it.

"I'm talking! Listen up. Listen up! If you don't have the brain to cry and beg for mercy, then shut up and listen! Oi!!" he said to the still giant. As if satisfied that the giant wasn't moving, he swung the chain.

The chain shortened and the metal ball floated. He put it on his shoulder.

"Don't be too reckless!" Troyatte said from a far distance. When did he arrive at Zuellni? The giants that had surrounded Ruimei had yet to discover him. Who knew when? But he was now standing with Ruimei.

Both of them didn't wear fighting clothes since they weren't fighting outside the city. Fighting clothes were unnecessary burdens in battles inside cities. Unlike Kalvan, the clothes would restrict their Kei flow.

"This is an Academy City? Cute boys and girls live here. They're in the shelter because of the monsters. We've to save them!"

Ruimei spat. "Your "man" isn't in there!"

"Of course, Danna! A man naturally uses his own skills to deal with any trouble. As for a woman, she ought to let a man do that for her and that means me, Troyatte!"

In his hand was a Dite in the shape of a cane.

"Let's first chase away the darkness here! It's too dark where I'm standing."

Tenkuru. Tenjuru..... Light up.

What was that guy joking about! Ruimei thought. Who cares what the name is! Besides, the name of Troyatte's technique changed according to his mood. He remembered the last time Troyatte used the name Birushana (notes: this means the light of Buddha.)



Troyatte raised his arm as he tightened his grip on the cane. Light suddenly spilled forth from Zuellni's sky. A gargantuan ball shone with light and illuminated the entire city, dispelling the darkness around them. The hour right now was noon. The light stopped at the edge of the city, where it looked like dawn.

"Light up! Light up more brightly!" Troyatte shouted.

The giants reacted to the light. They headed for the two Heaven's Blade successors.

Ruimei swung the large metal ball to strike and break apart the top half of one of the giants. The metal ball kept moving forward and destroyed more enemies to at last come to a stop on the body of an already dead giant. During this time, other giants had encircled him. They showed their fangs and attacked with the weapons in their hands.

Ruimei wasn't at all anxious. He did not retrieve the metal ball. Bare-handed, he stabbed an enemy's chest, his fingernails piercing the giant's skin, and he lifted him up with indescribable power. That giant then became his shield. Strange sounds came from the captive's mouth. His body trembled, and his arms and legs expanded in an unbelievable rate. His entire body expanded to a certain size and exploded. All the giants around Ruimei fell like weeds.

External Burst type Kei variation – Exploding Fist.

The smoke of the explosion quickly dissipated. Ruimei only sustained one burn injury, but he hadn't been defeated. He retrieved the metal ball with no expression.

Other giants had also reached Troyatte. The Heaven's Blade successor did not move. He kept his arms raised. The giants' footsteps shook the earth. Troyatte remained rooted on the spot, however, something had changed.

In the next split second, the giants were all painted with red. They were burning. Parts of their body were suddenly on fire. One had fire on his shoulder, one on his chest, one on his head..... Flame spilled from their bodies and their muscles melted into fiery blocks. The ball of light above Troyatte's head had caused many changes during this time. Karen Kei caused the density of the atmosphere to change, creating many things like magnifying glasses. Those

glasses turned to the giants, readied the right angle and began to concentrate, filtering the sunlight onto the targets.

If this was just normal sunlight, many magnifying glasses were needed to generate the high heat. But this light came from Troyatte's Kei. A very destructive power. Troyatte had no problem gathering that power.

There were about ten magnifying glasses, and around Troyatte were fifty giants, gathering closer and closer. Ruimei was probably facing that many giants too.

The giants burnt one after another, but it would still take time to turn them all into a sea of fire.

"Aaa, this is annoying," Ruimei called after hammering a giant's head into pieces. "If I could destroy Zuellni, then I could take care of these things immediately."

"Danna, that's the act of a villain!" Troyatte laughed.

"Well, though it's weaker than a filth monster in its aged phase, it's stronger than a male filth monster. What mysterious half-ass. The only fearful thing is their number. If a male appears before these green Military Arts Students, they'd definitely lose."

"Because Layfon's here? Where did that little brat go off to?"

"Playing around with Savaris. Haven't seen him either."

"Foul brat."

Ruimei snorted and looked at the city. Zuellni looked different from Grendan. Grendan had many more crude buildings, whereas the buildings here lacked unity. After all, this city consisted of students who all came from different cultural backgrounds. Ruimei thought that was a pretty good idea.

"I really want to destroy the city!"

"Be patient, Danna."

More giants appeared while they chatted. These giants had probably drowned the entire city. Their numbers must have reached 10 thousand! Delbone didn't tell them the exact number. Perhaps she knew but the Queen

thought it unnecessary to relay that piece of information. Was it a terrifying number? That thought alone made Ruimei furious.

Even so, only he and Troyatte were assigned to here. Lintence and Barmelin had moved, but they were carrying out another order. Did the Queen think Ruimei and Troyatte were enough to handle this situation? But other Heaven's Blade successors were guarding the contact point. Did she think the enemies would get past to the contact point? That made him even more furious.

"I'll destroy you all. Destroy every single one of you!" he rushed for the giants with the metal ball on his shoulder.

"Oi, I'll take care of the ones that have gone past Danna!"

"As if any would get past me."

"The lively Danna wouldn't do that!"

Really. As he thought, he would be the one to destroy this city himself. The metal ball flew in amidst the group of giants.



It was night, but the sky was unusually bright. Layfon felt that he had encountered this phenomenon before. He landed while this thought flashed past him..... He was in the outskirts of Zuellni. The feeling of desolation brushed past his skin. He shivered.

The bike didn't manage to last the entire journey. Though he thought the fight was finished, he knew a new battle had begun since Grendan made contact with Zuellni. But, no. Something wasn't right. What he felt now wasn't the feeling of desolation that appeared after the fight, and it wasn't the pressure of having to face new battles.

"Felli."

As he talked through the flake, he saw a man standing before him.

Savaris was waiting. Looking at his composed face, he probably knew of the situation too.

(This was what happened after we fought the first filth monster.....)

Felli begun to explain what had happened during the time when Layfon was away. Everything was shockingly real. Things that Layfon had never heard of. Things that he had never experienced before.

Felli continued the explanation.

Grendan's messenger – Delbone, the person who held the flake in the shape of a butterfly. Layfon immediately thought of her – even when Felli reported the name of the Psychokinesist. He had only seen her a few times and remembered she was an old woman. The way she talked never changed. It wasn't impossible to interact with Delbone, but she was a difficult woman.

Grendan was here to eliminate the filth monsters. That was possible. But why had it appeared here of all places? It couldn't be interested in an Academy City! Either way, consternation seized him at how Grendan had come all the way here. He remembered himself changing many roaming buses before reaching Zuellni! Words couldn't convey the entirety of that hardship.

Grendan's aim was the Haikizoku. Savaris was also here for it.

"What about the Captain?"

"She's fine. She's carrying out a mission for my brother."

Next, she told him how the Haikizoku seemed to have left Nina's body.

What was going on? But there was no time to get the details. All he needed was to understand the situation.

"....." he was stuck when he wanted to ask the next question. Was it appropriate to ask that question now?

(Leerin-san is also safe.)

But it seemed Felli knew what he was thinking. He felt a bit embarrassed at that, but the current situation wouldn't allow him to keep feeling awkward and shy.

"So you probably have a grip on the situation?" Savaris said.

He just stood there full of spirit. He still couldn't use his injured right arm.

"The Haikizoku has left the Captain."

But Layfon had also lost his weapon. He only had the Shim Adamantium Dite with him now. The Dite was now in the shape of a Katana. Layfon could use the techniques of Psyharden since the fight with Falnir. That was a big help to him.

"Oh."

Savaris didn't move.

"But the Haikizoku won't leave the city alone, since it's facing a crisis? It'll possess someone and show itself again."

"Grendan's here."

"Yes, I was surprised too! You might not believe this, but don't you think this city, being unable to move, is connected to something?"

"The other Heaven's Blade successors will defeat them."

Night turned to day. A huge source of light flew to their position. A ball of light had miraculously appeared above Zuellni. Layfon remembered this was Troyatte's Kei. That guy was here. The person that Layfon found hard to like. Troyatte's Karen Kei made him a hard to obtain talent suited to defending a city.

"What a headache! But there's someone else that makes this a pain."

As Savaris had said, Layfon could also feel the Kei of another person. A rough Kei.

"Ruimei....."

Oh no! What was the Queen thinking? Why did she send Ruimei to fight in a city? Savaris had said this before. If Ruimei wasn't cautious, he'd end up destroying the entire city, but wouldn't that crisis suit the Haikizoku?

No.....

Did the Haikizoku change after coming to Zuellni? Was this Grendan's aim? What would the Haikizoku do if Zuellni was destroyed and all its inhabitants were dead? Would it look for a new place that had Military Artists? In that case, Grendan was right here.

"Since I've left Grendan for a period of time, I wonder whether Her Majesty might have changed her mind....." Savaris smiled as usual, but Layfon disliked that face of his.

"So what do you plan to do now? But if you drag it out, Ruimei might clean this entire place."

He was happy. This was the situation he wanted, pushing Layfon into a corner and seeking for one last full power fight with him.

"The curtain's closed for too long. About time to get serious, uh?" he lifted his left arm. His right arm still hung down by his side. Was it too hurt to move or did he do that to draw Layfon into a trap?

"You are too arrogant."

"Yes, but you have to listen. You carry the lives of all Zuellni's students with you."

What should he do? He wanted to spit out that horrible tension in him. When he first arrived in Zuellni, he just raised his sword after some consideration. Because he had found the target to protect from that time on. Nina and the 17th platoon, and Meishen, Mifi and the others. They were all his friends, as if they had replaced the children in the orphanage. But that time he faced a female filth monster and its larvae. He had the confidence to defeat them even without the Heaven's Blade. But now?

Grendan. Just the name itself made his heart heavy. The despair in him was the same as when he fought the filth monster that tossed larvae into Zuellni. He knew his situation thoroughly. This time he faced Military Artists who were the equal of him when he held a Heaven's Blade. No, these Military Artists might even surpass him in power. In addition, there were more than ten of them, and they all had lots of battle experience. Moreover, the Queen stood above them all. That mysterious light that destroyed the filth monster was definitely the Queen's move.

"It's a bit heavy for one person to bear!" Savaris laughed even though his words were that of a sympathizer.

Layfon took down the helmet and tossed it away. He raised the restored Shim

Adamantium Dite. Kei ran up the blade. For one split second, if he could get rid of that man and stop Ruimei..... But could he win with this weapon? If Grendan truly wanted to destroy Zuellni, beating up Ruimei was not enough. As long as the person was a Heaven's Blade successor, he could destroy the city. Ruimei was only good at large scale fights. Troyatte should be able to manage that feat. Lintence might find it a bit difficult, but that was only a psychological problem.

Zuellni's crisis would remain if he didn't defeat all Heaven's Blade successors and the Queen.

The Katana was heavy. This was the first time that he felt it to be so weighty in his hands.

But the Kei inside him was running and bursting out intensely, so intense that his entire body hurt. If he poured that Kei into the Dite now, the blade would shatter. The long fight had tired him out, but his Kei vein showed no unusual signs. What was this feeling? He didn't think he had become stronger. But it felt like he had been released from something. This might even be a power that he had unknowingly sealed within him.

Layfon's realization was plain. Savaris' smile deepened. He was elated, an expression that one would never understand if one had not fought in battle; an expression that Layfon would never make. A fight was always just a means. To aim for battle was never something Layfon would do.

What did it mean? What was different? He had no time to think of that now.

First was Savaris.

That one single thought occupied his heart.

Chapter 5: The City that Eliminates Evil

Nelphilia's gaze moved away from the sky. Just this action alone pulled Nina in and made her stop breathing. Nelphilia's chin had only made an imperceptible movement, her gaze pulling away, and that was enough to capture Nina's heart.

This girl was dangerous.

This girl was dangerous. Just by looking at her, no, since her figure entered Nina's sight, she found herself unable to look at anything else. This girl's beauty and attraction was indescribable.

"As I thought, the Guardian Beasts aren't enough!" Nelphilia said. She wasn't looking at Nina, nor was she speaking to her.

"They're all destroyed!" she said and finally looked at Nina.

"All destroyed?"

This word sent a chill up Nina's spine. Did anyone die? Or.....

"The Guardian Beasts. You and the people with you, why did you come here?" Nelphilia smiled, looking at Karian and the Head of Alchemy who lay on the floor.

"I knew these two. The one with the terrible face has always wanted to wake me. The other views me as some kind of danger."

"..... Who are you?"

Nelphilia had her back on Nina, but her figure still attracted Nina's eyes. Just who was this girl?

"Are you really the Electronic Fairy that's split from Zuellni?"

"I hope you don't put me on the same scales as those fake imitations," the girl's serious eyes found Nina. "..... But, thanks to that thing coming, I'm now awake. The gear of time has begun moving. Everything's moving now. That's

why I woke. That's the result. That thing begins everything by coming here."

"What were you saying? Please explain it in a way that we understand," Nina said with dissatisfaction. If she didn't say this, that girl's attraction might take over her entire body.

"I'm not an Electronic Fairy, but I like Zuellni! Out of all the Electronic Fairies, I only like that child. Is that not enough a reason?"

"Then what are you?"

"What would you do if you found out? This has got nothing to do with you, right? Whether you know who I am, what you can do has nothing to do with my real body. That I can tell you. No matter which path you choose, you won't have anything to do with my real body," she said with determination. Though her tone was nonchalant, her words were obviously refusing Nina.

"This is all you need to do now," she said. Something had appeared in her hand.

"This is.....?"

Her fingers held the thing lightly. A mask. A mask of a beast. Nina had seen this before. This belonged to the Wolf Faces. She readied her iron whips.

"You..... Are you a Wolf Face!?" she pointed her iron whip at her.

"Your train of thought is so simple!" the girl said, not at all frightened at the weapon pointed at her. Disapproval showed in her eyes and she was not afraid as she placed the mask on her own face.

"Have a good feel of it with your body. You should be able to do that, right? Your body is half Electronic Fairy!"

Nina didn't understand her words in a split second, but the memory of what happened when she was ten rushed up inside her. That tiny Electronic Fairy. She had wanted to save it, but in the end, it saved her. She thought she understood something as she recalled her memory, but the next moment, she lost it. The true meaning of the mask before her suddenly rose in her.

"Haikizoku!"

That mask in the girl's hand, the Haikizoku that had shown itself as a golden

goat.

"Why?"

"Don't you remember? Who do you think you were talking to when you were defeated?"

She recalled the past event. Yes, it did happen. She remembered blacking out and losing consciousness. Sharnid had then saved her. So something had happened before that?

"That man, the Wolf Face you were talking about. And for the Haikizoku to turn into this, isn't it quite a convenient look? Its face reflects its master's appearance!"

She tossed the mask to Nina. Though both of Nina's hands were occupied with her iron whips, she reflexively caught the mask with her left wrist. As if melting, the mask sank into her chest.

It had returned. That was how Nina felt.

"Dixerio, the man who bets on the mask for his wish to revenge, is easy to understand? That thing is necessary to him, so he lets the Haikizoku keep its appearance in the mask. What about you?"

Nina didn't understand her question. She wasn't surprised that this girl knew of Dixerio. Since she knew the Wolf Faces, it wouldn't be strange for her to know Dixerio.

"You've the power that people are envious of. If you could obtain that power, what would you do with it?"

"Just what are you....."

"I anticipate it," the girl said, the shadows around her deepening into darkness as if to refuse Nina's hand. Gradually, darkness swallowed her pale face and arms.

When the darkness disappeared, it left behind the green light exuding from the tubes. The light was brighter than when the girl was present. It illuminated a bigger area than before.

Nina heard moaning in the room. Karian and the Head of Alchemy had

regained consciousness.



Layfon moved first. As if fishing up something, he aimed his attack at Savaris' upper body. It didn't hit. Savaris had deflected the attack. Savaris had released Kei from his body while retreating, using it to deflect Layfon's assault.

When Layfon swung his katana upward, Savaris had rushed him, left fist aiming for Layfon's cheek. Layfon attempted to grab the fist with his own left hand, only managing to grab hold of Savaris' wrist as the Heaven's Blade successor deflected Layfon's attack. Savaris added horrific pressure on his left wrist. Layfon, about to lose his grip, added strength to his fingers. The Kei covering Savaris' fist resisted Layfon's hand. Layfon gathered even more Kei to his fingertips.

Layfon had only managed to control Savaris' arm. As such, the Heaven's Blade successor attacked Layfon's knee with his foot. Layfon released his hold. The two jumped apart.

Layfon's fingertips were very hot. The glove he was wearing was torn through, with traces of injuries left on his fingers. Some of his nails had fallen off but his fingers had sunk deep into Savaris' wrist. There should be five lines of injuries on the Heaven's Blade successor's wrist. Additionally, Layfon's katana had slashed open the chest area of Savaris' fighting suit. Savaris had deflected the blade with his Kei, but it wasn't enough to completely stop Layfon's attack.

Savaris laughed. He tore the fighting suit apart to reveal his upper body. Blood welled up from the injuries on his left wrist. He licked his wounds. Layfon's fingernails were still in them. Savaris bit down on the fingernails, pulled them out and spat them out of his mouth. His smile looked even more appalling with blood in it.

"As I thought. In the end, only a fight with a fellow human can satisfy me. It isn't a fight of power alone, but of skill and closer to death!"

"As if I care," Layfon said and readied his katana again. The spirit he had

honed through training with the katana had chased away the pain in his left hand.

"The present you is just an existence that I have to surpass. The wall is high, and it's connected to other things too. I'm really envious of you. Perhaps it'd be more interesting if I stood on your side."

"These things aren't important," Layfon said and moved.

Three successive sudden strikes for the head, heart and head. Savaris failed to evade all three attacks and sustained shallow injuries on his shoulder and cheek. Two forces of Kei clashed and detonated, blowing the air into disarray. Savaris flew away in the air, as if bounding off something. He did a back-flip. Feeling something unpleasant on his chin, he quickly pulled back his body. Clamps seized his face. He felt fingers assaulting his face.

He was in the air.

External Burst type Kei – Sendan. (Lightning Cut)

Layfon's strike flew towards Savaris.

Savaris' slow vertical spin became horizontal as he kicked out with his foot.

External-type burst Karen Kei variant – Fuuretsukei. (Fierce Wind)

The mad running current of air was sucked into Savaris' Kei and then deflected. The condensed air pressure took Sendan head on and they canceled each other out. A new force of chaotic air was called forth and pushed back by the two combatants.

External-type Kei variant – Whirl Kei.

Guiding the flow of the air current, Layfon hid numerous bullets of Kei inside it.

External-type burst Karen Kei variant – Kishiyukubaku. (Compressed air)

Savaris' move compressed air into one point. He detonated it to cancel Layfon's bullets. The remnants of the explosion flew towards Layfon.

Combined Internal and External Kei Variant – Ryuusen Kei. (Spinning Dragon)

Layfon spun to deflect the remnants as his spin drew in more air currents,

sucking in Savaris as well. For a split second, Savaris had lost control of his body, and Layfon did not let that opportunity go.

External Burst type Kei – Sendan. (Lightning Cut)

The condensed Kei that flew out of the typhoon was enough to split a person in half.

"Haha!"

External Burst type Kei, Luckens' move – Roar Kei.

Savaris' voice made the air vibrate, scattering the roiling dust that came from the battle. The vibration that couldn't possibly have come from a human's voice decomposed the dust into finer particles. The thin dust screen gathered by the exchange of Kei techniques, Layfon's Ryuusen Kei and the Savaris' Kishukubaku, now scattered in all directions.

Explosions surrounded Savaris. Sendan pierced through those explosions to draw a shallow ditch on the outer shell of the city.

Layfon didn't feel he had finished his opponent. Numerous explosions had drastically reduced visibility. And he didn't think the sparks caused by the dust were enough to create such large explosions. There must be a trap. But what was it?

"Tsk."

He stopped the Ryuusen Kei and retreated. The trap must be close to him. Using the rebounding force of the External Kei, he moved back a hundred meters or so from his spot before his foot touched ground. He felt he had the advantage when the two forces of Kei clashed, but that was exactly why he felt Savaris had laid a trap for him.

All the explosions had finished detonating when he landed. The turbulent air had yet to settle. Dense smoke rose to cloud his vision. He couldn't feel any Kei around him. Savaris must have used Sakkei to mask his presence. Where did Savaris plan to ambush him?

It wasn't strange to think Savaris would attack from anywhere, as he was a Heaven's Blade successor. He could even come from the ground beneath

Layfon's feet. If Layfon lost his concentration, it would lead to his defeat.

He was ready no matter where Savaris came at him. He considered where Savaris could attack him. Though he knew this would obstruct the flexibility of his movement and expose him, though he could only greet the attack through the instincts honed in training, he could not stop thinking.

The previous explosion bothered him. The dust cloud caused by it did well to hide Savaris' figure. However, Sakkei itself was not enough to totally mask the flow of Kei unless the Kei vein itself was taken out. In that case, the best timing and location to close with Layfon was.....?

Above. Explosion. Take advantage. Jump.

Those terms flashed past his head, and he moved.

As he had thought. Savaris was above him. Their gazes met. The explosion had painted black Savaris' bloody smile, making it more horrific. He had stopped using Sakkei and concentrated the Kei around him to his left fist.

Layfon made an instant judgment that this move was to decide the outcome of the fight. His body naturally reacted and readied his stance to meet the attack.

Psyharden technique – Homuragiri Shoujin. (Flame strike - Flying Blade)

Layfon jumped as he struck with the katana. Flame writhed on the blade. The strike of the katana brushed past Savaris as two forces of Kei ate into each other. The impact was just one swift moment, and next, both fighters had exchanged positions.



The fight hadn't ended. The impact of the opponent's move swam in Layfon's body. Pain. Red dots that weren't of his flame danced in his sight but he ignored them. He changed his stance. Savaris had also landed to ready his next attack.

But this time.....

Psyharden technique – Homuragasane Koufu. (Flame weight - Red Cloth)

External-type Kei variant – Goushiyoudan. (Rising bullet)

External Kei in the form of flames poured out upon Savaris like a red roaring waterfall. Savaris received it with Goushiyoudan. Explosion. Impact. The impact sent Layfon tens of meters from his original position and forced him to land. Savaris had stopped his movement as he shouldered the descending impact of Layfon's move.

Psyharden technique – Mizukagamiwatari. (Reflecting Water Ferry)

With a speed that was even faster than Uzu Kei (external Whirl Kei), Layfon rushed Savaris. Their gazes overlapped. Though Savaris had yet to ready his stance, he managed to react with his leg. Feeling the kick of a death god nearing his right side, Layfon swung the katana without hesitation. He aimed at Savaris' throat in an attempt to finish this battle with one move.

The flowing of time was extremely quiet. Death was closing in. Death was about to descend on him. Which side was faster? Or they might react simultaneously. Layfon did not defend against Savaris' kick. If Layfon was faster, then the threat against him would vanish. If he was slower, he'd die.

Death. He had wanted to kill Gahard at that time but he did not. That man was connected to the Luckens family. Was he now to kill off a Heaven's Blade born to that family? He could not stop his movement now. If he didn't kill his opponent, only death awaited him.

The katana stabbed at Savaris' throat without deviating an inch. Layfon felt it touch skin and break through muscles. But next, a painful impact assaulted his shoulder.

Time returned to the two fighters. Savaris' kick sent him flying. He slid on air as if something was pulling him out and then tossed him onto the ground. The katana flew from his grip to pierce the earth.

"Wu....."

Pain ran through his entire body. His right shoulder was dislocated. Wounds broke over his body. He felt something wet beneath his tattered fighting suit. He pushed the right shoulder back in place. The stimulation made him moan. He picked up the Dite beside him.

Savaris had fallen. He wasn't moving. Blood welled from his neck wound to pool around him. Dead, or, he was about to die. The light in his opened eyes was lost. He probably was still alive as he was looking at Layfon's direction, his lips trembling but without voice. Probably because his throat's been cut open. Layfon originally planned to completely stab through that throat, but the kick had intercepted his move. If Savaris' knee had contacted with Layfon's shoulder rather than part of his foot, then Layfon's shoulder would have been shattered. The impact might have even damaged his lungs. What a close call. And if Savaris could use his right arm, things wouldn't have turned out this way.

"....."

Layfon left Savaris as he quietly ran internal Kei through his body. He still had many people to defeat.

I'll probably die.

That thought echoed in Savaris' head as he felt something flowing out with the blood. He didn't regret it. He didn't even think of another outcome if he could move his right arm. To have strong mental preparation was his all. It would have been shameful to consider that other possibility after the fight.

Layfon had left him, carrying his own wounds. He probably planned to keep fighting. Ruimei was his next opponent. The one after him was probably Troiatte. And then he would have to fight all the Heaven's Blade successors. Where would he end up? Or, where would he fall? Savaris was envious of him.

He had always wanted to challenge the Queen, and he did do it, but he lost. He had lost to the Queen who had held back in the fight. After that day, he had fought filth monsters in order to once again challenge her. He thought he'd surpass her one day. But it wasn't too bad to fight Layfon in this desperate situation. Yes, he had nothing except himself in a desperate situation. That was

why he could use power above his real strength. Layfon was probably in that situation back then. Savaris also wanted to find that extra something in himself. But he probably wouldn't find it as he wasn't interested in anything outside battle. No matter. He was comfortable. As long as he lived, a day of satisfaction would never come. It might not be that bad to die here.

"Are you to die here?"

Though blood flowed out from him and his consciousness was gradually fading, his sense of hearing was still sharp. He heard footsteps. The ball of light from Troiatte cast a long shadow on Savaris.

"You boring guy. Are you to die here because you went overboard playing?"

His vision was dimming, but he recalled that voice and realized it was Lintence. He opened his mouth and wanted to greet him with spirit, but all that came out was blood.

"I've a message from the Queen."

He felt sharp pain and heat on his body that was like fire. His body was still weak but the blood flow had stopped. Savaris coughed violently as blood continued to spill from his mouth. When he stopped coughing, the flow through his throat was better. He could now breathe.

"We're already short of one person. We can't let one more die. The Queen is the one to decide when you are to die."

Lintence had used his Steel Threads to sew up Savaris' injuries. The Kei generated heat to burn the wounds and seal them, completely stemming the flow of blood. Perhaps he had also perfectly sewn up the Kei vein.

"Th..... Thanks," he said. His voice was hoarse and weak.

"But speaking of which, what's with this commotion?"

"Hell's about to descend. Aren't you good? Having your name taken out of the comrade list?"

Savaris saw him leaving. Looking at his back that moved towards the center of the city, Savaris was very envious of Layfon.

Having his life saved, his desire for battle had re-awakened. But even he was

unable to do anything more with his body. This was disappointing.



Leerin had done what she could. She had helped with cooking, setting up tables and eating utensils. No matter what task it was that anyone thought was short of people, Leerin was able to make them feel they had too many helpers. She wanted to do something for them. Only that could keep her calm.

Very quickly, she had finished everything and had nothing else to do.

"Could you take a look at Mei for me?" Naruki said as Leerin helped to deliver food to injured Military Artists. Though Naruki was also wounded, she could still move around. However, she could not return to the battlefield immediately. Right now, she was helping out the City Police. Mifi was somewhere here, but she was probably busy with people that she knew.

"Seems she's preparing for an activity to keep everyone's spirit up."

What a good idea. Ignore the possibility that the event might not be interesting, but it would be a good distraction.

Leerin headed for Meishen's room alone. She touched her face unconsciously. Her right eye was still closed, but no one had noticed. No..... One person had noticed.

Nina. Only she had noticed Leerin's eye was closed. Why her? Nina didn't feel anything strange and special about her closed right eye. But no one else had noticed. This meant Nina might also have something in her, something that could be similar to what was inside Leerin. Perhaps the event here was connected to the event in Myath. But what was it? The mysterious Wolf Faces organization had attempted to seize Myath's Electronic Fairy. That was all she understood. All the information she held now was just bits and pieces. Too broken to be put back together. If what the Wolf Faces did was just a process to reach their goal, then what were they aiming for? And what was the fruit of that aim? Was her right eye part of it? Who was she?

Thoughts continued to churn inside Leerin's head, unable to halt. She didn't

know how to handle those questions. Something must have happened opposite the shelter. And this wasn't connected to the reality. It felt like something that Leerin had felt before. A feeling of dislike chased after her.

So who was Leerin? She kept asking herself. She had never thought of this before. At the orphanage, some children were taken in by other families, some were adopted, and others were taken to work. Particularly for those people who had a craft skill, they often visited the orphanage as they wanted apprentices who could learn a skill at a young age. But no one had requested for Leerin, and Leerin didn't regret it. All she was bothered was that she didn't have any parents. Derek never said anything about her origin. Different reasons explained the outcome of one becoming an orphan. And among those reasons, some could be said, some couldn't. If Derek had told some orphans of things that weren't important and consequential, others who weren't told of anything would feel despair. As such, he didn't say anything.

Leerin understood why her adopted father said nothing, so she never asked. But she did want to know. No, perhaps even Derek didn't know why she wanted to know. She wasn't sure whether she had been adopted once when she was born. But what existed must have undergone a process. Leerin's eye..... the eye that reflected what a normal eye couldn't perceive, this right eye – there must be a reason existing in Leerin. Nothing had happened in her when she was in Grendan, but an omen was given to her when she met Synola. In that case, "because I left Grendan" couldn't be a reason. Though it might be the reason to awaken that thing, it wasn't enough to explain the existence of her right eye.

Something was slowly putting pressure on her head. That feeling filled her as she walked. She had felt something changing. Something was happening above the ground. Were they connected? What should she do?

You can do nothing. That was what that girl had said. The black clothed girl looked the same as the girl in Leerin's memory, but she was a different person.

..... Though she recalled the girl in her memory, she only remembered her appearance. It wasn't strange for her to mistake this girl as the girl in the memory. She didn't know why, but she felt the girl was of a personality that would arouse pity and sympathy, looking at her appearance.

But why could Leerin not accept this thinking?

She remembered what the girl had said.

You can do nothing.

What was going on? She was challenging Leerin. Leerin felt the other person was simply narrating a truth. The existence in her right eye seemed to be related to this commotion. Then what did she mean that she could do nothing? What did she want to do? How did she plan to carry it out? These things that had already been decided were mysteries to Leerin. Was this what the girl wanted to express? How painful a thing it was. This seemed to be Leerin's will but in reality, it wasn't. Though she chose certain actions, she felt those things had already been decided.

Her inability to understand these things brought her unease. She didn't even know what she could do about it. Leerin came to the patient's room, perturbed. She clapped her face lightly to soften her expression.

Meishen was already up. This was a room housing many patients. Leerin saw her sitting up through the gap in the curtain separating the beds. Meishen looked eased at seeing Leerin.

"Are you all right?"

"Uh, the doctor said I can leave when I feel ready. I'm sorry."

"That can't be helped."

Leerin sat beside her. There weren't many chances for them to be alone. Naruki and Mifi were usually with Meishen. Meishen was like a kid, a kid who tended to suffer when she was alone. Leerin didn't think that was a good thing. She didn't feel refusal or alarm from Meishen for sitting so close. It was proof of how good their relationship was.

"Is it really bad outside?"

"I'm not sure. Have you seen Naruki and Mifi?"

"Mi's visited me already. Is Naruki injured?"

"Yeah, but she seems okay. She's working with the City Police."

Leerin told her of what she knew.

This was a very usual and relaxing hour, but Leerin felt a sense of tension coming from the outside of the ceiling and from something else she couldn't pinpoint. She then realized that the tension came from Meishen.

Meishen was used to looking at people from a low angle. It probably came from her shy personality. She always had her head down. It was difficult to look her in the eye. But it seemed she came to this city to change her personality. Since coming here, she had met Layfon and was now talking to Leerin.

Leerin found that part of her strong. The attempt to change her current self was a fight that was harder than any other fights. Layfon also wanted to change his lifestyle. Though his first intention was to abandon his life as a Military Artist, the intention was different now. Leerin was a bit worried that he was only being pulled around by fate.

Nina was the same. The people Leerin lived with in the dormitory were also the same. She felt they were fighting something against themselves. Perhaps everyone who came to an Academy City was the same. Otherwise, they wouldn't have taken the roaming bus and left their city on a life-threatening journey. But if that was the case, then this world had too many battlefields.

"Lay.... ton..... Layfon. Is he not back?"

For Meishen to say this with this expression, this must be a part of her fight. Perhaps it wasn't something big to others, but it must be an important battle for her.

"Yeah, he's not back."

Speaking of which, Leerin hadn't heard of any news about him even though Nina was back.

"..... Are you not worried?"

She didn't know how to answer. She didn't think Layfon would die and sustain heavy injuries. She had met Nina when she was preparing meals. If something terrible had happened to him, Nina wouldn't have hidden his condition and kept calm. That didn't match her personality. This meant Layfon was fine. That was Leerin's belief. She could only believe as she couldn't do anything else.

"Because I can't do anything, I can only believe in him."

She had journeyed to this city to give Derek's katana to Layfon. An incredible event had happened at that time and she had told him how she thought. He must be fighting a terrible fight right now. She felt he was in the most difficult fight out of all his battles. In Grendan, he could leave the fights to others, but not in Zuellni. That was why she wished for him to take up the katana. She wasn't against him continuing to be a Military Artist. She wanted him to take up the katana so that he wouldn't be crippled when he had to give his all. In the end, Layfon decided to pick up the katana once more. He had accepted her thinking and Derek's forgiveness. In his heart, he had not abandoned his past in Grendan. Though she felt his refusal to take up the katana was his stubbornness about the past, she had managed to persuade him. She was very happy that he understood her. That was why she firmly believed in him, believed that he would safely return just like the times in Grendan.

..... Strange?

"You're strong," Meishen said with her head lowered.

Leerin ignored the light swaying in her heart and looked at her. From the start, Meishen was bent over her knees on the bed, looking at her own feet.

"I can't be as strong as you. I've..... I've always worried. I don't know what to do."

A dark spot stained her dress. The trace of something wet..... the trace of a tear. Tears fell from her face.



Was she so worried that she had to cry? Leerin remembered that she also cried when she reunited with Layfon and saw the wounds on his body. That had never happened in Grendan as there were many Military Artists who were strong like Layfon. She always believed that Layfon would return.

"I'm worried about Naruki too, and everyone else. As long as it's someone I've seen, the Military Artists in the class. What would I do if they're not here tomorrow? Just that thought alone makes me feel so uncomfortable. I'm more worried about Layfon. Compared to worrying about Naruki, I think I'm more worried about him."

"Uh."

Leerin felt her own reply was weak. What meaning had she put in that reply? Agreement? Acceptance? Or did she only reply to allow the other person to keep talking?

"I..... I..... like Layfon. Perhaps, he's the first boy that I like."

"Uh."

Still weak.

After knowing that Meishen had read Layfon's letter, she immediately knew that Meishen liked Layfon. The other two girls that she noticed also were Nina and Felli. She wasn't sure at first as she thought they were with him because they were both Military Artists. After knowing them more, she was certain that Felli liked Layfon. Nina's feeling was delicate. If it was the case, she probably didn't notice her own feelings due to other distractions.

She could tell how proactive Meishen was by her action of reading the letter. Though she suspected Meishen's personality was shy through her actions, she was in reality a shy person. Meishen wanted to change. Of course, her action might have come about through her childhood friends giving her a helping push from behind. If Meishen hadn't fallen for Layfon, perhaps she would have already changed her personality. Layfon was too clumsy and slow in areas other than Military Arts. To make a girl like Meishen take such action, this man was too foolish. Leerin really wanted to scold him and call him a wooden person. Layfon was able to make another feel angry like that.

"Leerin's strong. I don't know what I should do."

Meishen sobbed with her hands covering her face. Leerin placed her hand on Meishen's back, patting her. The girl's entire body shook.

Leerin didn't know what to say. What should she do? What should she convey to her? What should she do for Meishen who worried about Layfon so much that she cried for him? She couldn't do anything if not for Mifi.

She handed Meishen to Mifi's care. So relieved. At the same time, she wondered whether she was over her head. She was relieved to escape from that scene. She had many things to ponder – about that girl, about her closed right eye that no one noticed, about more important questions. But these were just excuses. What she had noticed in the conversation with Meishen shook her more intensely. She had forgotten the questions about herself and her right eye when she sat beside Meishen.

Leerin left for the corridor.

This was not her home city. She had thought of it during the time in the roaming bus and the time of her earlier days in Zuellni. But now that she had spent three months in Zuellni, that thought had vanished.

She now told herself once more that this wasn't her home city. This wasn't Grendan. And this might not be the place that she should be in.

The person she hoped for, the thing she hoped for. All that had ended when she handed Derek's Dite to Layfon. She had nothing else to do here. Though she could learn many things in the Academy City, she wanted to return to Grendan. She wanted to go back.

She wanted to take glimpses of the orphanage from far away. She wanted to make meals for Derek. She wanted to feel the atmosphere of the small and narrow, unlike in Zuellni, classroom. She wanted to see Synola-senpai's foolish acts. She suddenly felt these yearnings. Though she didn't cry, she felt the inside of her head heating up.

She walked and continued to walk, but no matter where she came to, she couldn't calm down. This was a shelter during a crisis. This was Zuellni. In a shelter in Grendan, at least she had something. Since when she was little, she

had entered the shelter once a month like a routine. Having left the orphanage to enter the shelter, she had met other children and had argued with them. She had experienced the time of being provoked to anger and being told to stop arguing.

Since living on her own, she had been visiting a different shelter. The canteen area where she helped to make meals had calmed her down. The people she met there would greet her when they saw her. They'd even tell her where to buy cheap food. The foundation of her life was there. Right now, she wished and longed for it. She wanted something to rely on.

She knew she had become weaker, and she hated it. She had been hesitating. Wavering on if she should come here. And after contemplating, came here. She wanted to meet Layfon. Meet, and then... What did she want to do after seeing him? She felt she wouldn't know until she met him. She did intend to to understand her own heart, but she felt it would be unclear if she took one more step.

She wanted to confirm everything – her feelings, Layfon's feelings, and the future.

These things had ended. She felt that had ended on the first night in the shelter.

Her right eye hurt. She wanted to tell someone about it.

Meishen's feeling was painful for her.

She wanted someone to listen to her so she could get some answer. She wished someone could clearly point out to her what she wished for. She was becoming weak.

When she came to, she was already standing there.

No one was here. The group of eyeballs was gone. Had they truly disappeared or had they simply become invisible? She wanted to try opening her right eye, but the pain didn't allow her. Her right eye seemed to be refusing to open itself.

"Seems you can't open it for the time being."

This was a voice so light that it could pierce through air. This girl stood next to

her and looked the same as the other girl. As expected, this girl was not the same person.

The beautiful girl wearing clothes the color of the night sky stood next to her. She stood there as if it was matter of fact.

Who, who are you?

That was what she wanted to ask, but she said something instead.

"What's happened to you?"

How come this girl could see through her heart?

"I've been sleeping. Always sleeping," the girl said faintly.

Leerin felt this wasn't the answer she wanted. But. No.

"If it's just sleeping, I can sleep anywhere, but I just want to sleep beside that person."

"Right?"

Leerin felt this was important.

"What's your name?"

"Saya."

Leerin was satisfied with the concise answer. Nelphilia and this girl were like the same person on different side of the mirror. Though Leerin wanted to ask about Nelphilia, she didn't say anything.

"It'll be painful," Saya said.

Saya's words seemed to point to the future after this moment, Leerin's closed right eye and all that were to happen to her. Painful. Leerin wanted to tell someone about it and rely on that someone. Only one person floated in her mind. He looked so unreliable, but he made people want to rely on him. The man that she had always wanted to believe in.

"Even so....."

The pain in her right eye slowly faded. She thought it was due to Saya. Right eye. The true owner of the right eye wished for Saya, and that wish had flowed

through to Leerin. That owner should be in the place it wished for.

There was such a place for Leerin too. Her birthplace, the place she wanted to live in.....

"If I can return."

She must return. She had done everything she needed here. And, the problems born here, the questions, in order to unlock them, Leerin felt she must come back to Grendan. Once she had returned, she could sort out her feelings for Layfon.



What bad concentration in this area.

"Ah?"

Though he hadn't managed to count the number of giants from the very beginning, the fact that the number continued to be incredibly large was annoying. Ruimei shouldered the metal ball, his presence an aura of danger to his opponents.

The giants kept rushing towards him, but the distance between them wasn't all that close. If he destroyed them all with one move, he'd end up damaging the city. Hence, the temporary strategy was to draw the giants close and destroy them.

The number closing on him was reducing.

"What do you think? Old woman?"

(Here. Here.)

The image projected from Delbone's flake beside him was a map of Zuellni. Numerous dots of light adorned the map.

(The number's reduced drastically in this vicinity. That's brilliant, Ruimei.)

"Of course," he said and put out his chest.

"But this feels rather unreal. The enemy hasn't come. What's going on?"

He could clearly see the density of light in some areas. The area where he was in and the area that Troiatte had headed for did not have that many light dots.

On the other hand, the light dots had gathered elsewhere. It appeared Ruimei and Troiatte hadn't attracted their attention. Something else had drawn them in.

"This seems unrelated to the two idiots playing on the outskirts."

(That's Savaris and Layfon.)

"He lost? That stupid brat."

Ruimei had felt the Kei of both of them. The fight had borne a clear outcome. Since both sides were alive, this meant Savaris must have lost.

(Savaris' right arm is injured.)

"This naive thinking isn't like you. An injury means nothing once one stands in the battlefield. What's wrong is for the injured person to head into battle with an injury."

He could feel from the flake that the old woman was smiling. He sucked in a breath and looked at the projected image again.

"Whatever. These guys aren't just making a ruckus. Is it all right for me to stand here and not move?"

(We've made preparation for Troiatte and Barmelin to move. Lintence is probably already over there.)

"What the, making everything so grand? What about me?"

(I thought you don't like doing small things?)

"Tsk!" he made his disapproval loud.

Delbone's laughter echoed in the battlefield.

A figure had come to visit.

"Aaa?"

Ruimei turned around.



An emergency notice from a Psychokinesist.

(A large number of filth monsters has gathered near the entrance of A10!)

Nina and the others were in the underground research lab. Karian and the Head of Alchemy had just woken up. Their stiff faces looked even worse at the news.

"Heaven's Blade..... What about Grendan's Military Artists?" Karian asked, supporting his head with his hand. His consciousness seemed confused.

(They're fighting in the middle of the city. Their speed is unbelievable. The filth monsters have suddenly changed their direction and headed this way.)

"What about Vance?"

(Captain Vance has already gathered the Military Artists that can still move and have assigned them. He's also ordered the students in area A to evacuate. The main door hasn't yet received an impact, but that's just a matter of time.)

"Once everyone's evacuated, seal off the entire area A. No need to think of us. Just pretend I'm not here and give all the commanding authority to Vance."

(Roger.)

The Psychokinesist was silent.

"Looks like we can't return," Sharnid said.

"I'm worried about Gorneo and Shante. We've to let them know of this," Nina said.

Karian nodded. "If they can retreat to here, at least we can gain some time. I'm counting on you."

The Head of Alchemy was looking at the empty container, numbed. Karian nodded.

Nina and Sharnid rushed out. Nina's mood had changed. This wasn't the time to think about the disappearing girl.

They ran through the abandoned house to the outside. Trees burned everywhere around them. This was Shante's Karen Kei. Even the dried leaves that filled the courtyard were burning. A number of giants were in the middle of

the flame where Gorneo and Shante were.

"Sharnid, head for the roof," Nina said and cut open a path through the flame with her iron whips to stand beside Gorneo.

"You all right?"

"Okay," he said but he wasn't in his best condition.

Small wounds covered his body. Blood had seeped through his clothes. Shante wasn't injured, but she looked weakened. Nina could tell her level of concentration had dropped as she was worried about Gorneo.

"No matter how many times we kill them, they keep reviving. What terrible regenerative power."

There were eight giants here. Some carried traces of the flame. Some had a big impression in their stomachs, left behind by Gorneo's fist. Some had missing muscles in their shoulders, probably done by Shante's spear, as if the injuries were formed after an explosion. However, bubbles formed around the wounds to fill them up. The giants didn't look tired at all. But Gorneo and Shante failed to hide their exhaustion. They had fought too long.

"The filth monsters have gathered around the shelter. We can't return."

"I see."

Gorneo was not shaken at the news.

"Grendan's Military Artists are fighting in the middle of the city. The filth monsters had changed their direction afterward."

"I don't think they've fled. They're looking for a new target. Either way, the number here probably won't increase."

The giants closed in on them. Shante jumped as Gorneo kept close to the ground. Nina moved for one of the giants as if that giant had pulled her over. She knew she couldn't enter Gorneo and Shante's fight.

Sudden attacks from both sides caused confusion for the giants. Gorneo seized the chance and hammered his fist into a giant's knee. Something in it broke. The giant lost its balance and fell. Shante then stabbed her spear into the giant's enormous mouth, filling its inside with flame Kei. Fire seeped out from

between the giant's teeth.

During this time, Nina had come near a giant. The giant raised a weapon that looked like a sword but it had not the sword's sharpness. But if Nina got hit by that weapon, swung by the huge body of the giant, she would easily break into pieces.

The giant saw Nina closing in on a crouch.

The giant suddenly shook. Sharnid's bullet had opened a hole in the giant's head. Nina took the chance to rush close to the giant's chest and had also chosen to destroy the giant's knee. While the giant fell, she swung upward with her second iron whip, using all of her strength to send her opponent flying.

Eliminate it..... But other giants had started to move. She could only release External Kei as she returned to the original position. She had Sharnid's support. At first, he sniped from the roof, but after that, he had moved to other locations. He probably didn't want his location exposed and ended up drawing an enemy to him. He must have made that decision looking at how the giants had moved in an organized manner.

These weren't normal filth monsters. They not only looked different but Nina realized something after having fought them for some time. At first, they attacked in pairs, making it easy for her. But they might just be confirming the number of enemy reinforcements.

"This is difficult."

"Yes, though they aren't like us, they fight with precision."

Eight giants surrounded them. It didn't seem any more giants would join in the fight. If Nina's side couldn't break through this circle, they'd be destroyed.

Bubbles filled the wounded knee and the burnt mouth of the giant that Gorneo and Shante had defeated. It stood back up. Nina's giant did the same.

"This takes forever if we don't annihilate them."

"But if we do that, other giants will attack together. That happened already," Gorneo said. He was probably injured during that time.

"A long fight is disadvantageous for us."

"Military Artists only hold the advantage of speed. We can only do it that way then."

Gorneo quickly understood her. They were now four instead of two. Three of them were to attack while Sharnid's bullet served to stall the giants. They didn't have Felli's flake with them. The flake they had was used as communication between Karian and Vance. Since they had no flake, could Sharnid understand their plan? Though Gorneo felt uneasy, he could only trust him.

"Ha!"

Shante moved. She roared and jumped high. Gorneo also ran out and headed for the giant that was regenerating. Since this giant moved the slowest, they would use it to test the strategy.

Same as before, the giant ignored Shante and concentrated on Gorneo, sweeping in with its weapon. It must have hated the attack on its legs more than the attack from above. Gorneo jumped. The weapon struck the ground. Dust and soil scattered. Gorneo met Shante in the air. He reached out with his strong arms, his palms opened. Shante stood on his hands. The two wordlessly completed their form.

Gorneo tossed her. Shante held the spear before her and flame Kei shot out from it.

"Shoudansen!"

The tip of the spear pierced through the giant's back. The flame burned and melted the muscles surrounding the spear. The spear appeared from the giant's chest. Shante let go of the weapon and jumped back. As if following close to her, Gorneo landed.

External Burst Kei variation - Gouriki | tooru ha << Teppa >>. Totsu.
[Submerging power. Dash.]

His kick connected with the spear, causing it to fly out of the giant's chest. At the same time, Kei was driven through the spear into the giant's body to destroy it from its inside. Cracks ran through the opponent's entire body.

"Nina!" he shouted as he jumped away.

Nina was ready. She had included the dust created by the giant's strike in her calculation. Moreover, Sharnid had seized the best timing to shoot randomly to attract the attention of other giants. If that hadn't happened, both Shante and Gorneo couldn't have attacked with full power as they had to be alert on the movements of other giants.

Their combination was completed before the dust fell. Besides, the rising current of air caused by the flame prevented the dust from falling too quickly. Nina's figure vanished for one swift moment in the dust screen. If one couldn't read Kei, one could not discover her location.

Release. Internal and External Kei variation - Raijin.

She ran.

The chest of the fallen giant had started regenerating. What horrible life force. Could she completely destroy it? The doubt instantly vanished. Nina ran like lightning.

Her iron whip struck the enemy's head. The head tore off the body and flew away like a cannonball. The remaining body also flew out, deflected by the Kei weaving around Nina's body. The body hit somewhere hundreds of meters away. Its impact was loud. Nina shook away the remnants of Kei on herself and kicked the spear back to Shante. Though her kicking the spear was rude, it was better not to let go of her weapon in a battle. Without a complaint, Shante spun in the air to receive the spear.

Nina didn't have the confidence that her last strike had completely destroyed the giant. She also had not the time to confirm. The giants that Sharnid had distracted had gathered to attack them, as if realizing that attacking them together was the best. Seven giants came at them, giving off the feeling of a wall moving.

This wall was just too huge. They had the advantage if they were to surround one person while swinging their weapons. Moreover, both their bodies and weapons were massive, whereas Nina's side was quite small. She ran and evaded two giants. At the same time, the giants had avoided Gorneo and Shante's combined attack.

Right now, she could only choose to run away. She ran as she checked

whether the giant she fell had stood back up. Gorneo was also running. Shante, since her body was lighter, was jumping from one giant's head to another, attacking their heads while she leapt.

Nina must observe. These giants were huge and powerful, but their speed paled into insignificance compared to Military Artists. Their basic characteristics were not that different from filth monsters.

As expected, it was more worrying to see Shante jump and move overhead. She was attracting the giants' attention more. Gorneo had realized this too. He judged the timing and attacked the giants to divert their attention.

They couldn't use this strategy. But how could she convey that thought to Gorneo? She hadn't got any extra time for that. It was already difficult to carry out the combined attack without a Psychokinesist. How reliable a Psychokinesist was.

What could they do? They couldn't use the combination strategy anymore. And even if possible; they needed to first reduce the number of enemies by half. Half..... Was there a way to defeat three giants? If this kept going, Nina's side would lose.

"Any ways....." She thought as she evaded the giants.

There were two giants on her side, three on Gorneo's and three on Shante's. Sharnid's bullets flew in between the three people to keep the formation from getting any worse. The bullets did little harm to the giants, but sometimes they hit and the impact was considerable. Perhaps he had noticed the giants' weakness. If they had a flake, they could communicate with him..... A thought flashed past her mind. But.... Who knew whether it'd work until one tried it out?

"I can only try and find out."

Whether it was Gorneo and Shante, after having run away from the giants for a while, both would want to team up with Nina and attack.

Nina finally came to the location she wanted. The giant before her moved slower than others. Shante was behind this giant with three other giants around her. If possible, Nina wanted Gorneo to take this job instead, but there wasn't

enough time.

The only way was to bet on it.

She retreated from the giant but suddenly shortened the distance between them. The giant's footsteps erred because of her unpredictable movement. As its body was much larger than her, even a light kick of the foot was enough to send her flying. Nina struck its leg with the left iron whip, making it fall backward with its face skyward. She then raised the right iron whip, ignoring another giant that was heading this way opposite her. She continued to gather Kei in the weapon.

Sharnid's bullet, though weak in appearance, hit the giant. As if it had its central nervous system hit, the giant stopped its steps and its entire body twisted. It placed its weaponless hand on its chest where a thing that looked like an eyeball was buried in its muscles.

Nina studied the ball.

"Ha!" and she struck it with the right iron whip with her full strength.

The giant wailed as the ball shattered. Bubbles immediately gushed out to envelop the ball, but the giant did not stand up again. Perhaps this thing was where all the sensory organs were? She thought so. Its regenerative power was too incredible. Besides, the giant's form was similar to a human's, mistaking them to think the head was its weak point.

Sharnid's sniping helped him search for the giant's weakest point, and he had quickly taken notice of the ball. Close and long distance combat had shown their difference.

Sharnid's fire had stopped the giant and Nina had dealt it a heavy blow, destroying the ball-like thing. However, that wasn't enough to kill it and stop its entire movements.

Was this it? As she thought of the worst case scenario, Shante descended from the sky. The spear stabbed into the giant's chest.

"Ahhhhhhh!" she roared as flame Kei exploded. The giant's limbs vibrated and finally stopped.

"That ball! The chest!" Nina shouted at Shante and Gorneo. But it wasn't that easy to obliterate the giant.

"Jump!" Nina shouted.

As Shante was trying to pull the spear out of the giant's chest, she had lost some time to escape. The giant behind was closing on her. Nina leapt to stand behind Shante. The giant's weapon was high above its head. Kongoukei. She hoped that was enough.

Shante turned around but Nina had no time to look at her. She crossed the iron whips and got ready to receive the swing. Unbelievable pressure pressed down on her wrists. She could bear this. Ten seconds. This digit surfaced in the calm that was her head. She knew she didn't have enough strength to bear this pressure for a long time. Pain flared in her chest, in the location where the mask tossed by Nelphilia had melted into. Are you here? Nina asked.

No reply.

"Gu.....!"

The bones made noises in her back. The pain from her wrists shot up to her head. She was running short on time. Shante finally retrieved the spear. Gorneo had also taken action, burying his fist in the giant's chest. The giant moaned and stepped back. Nina jumped away. Shante shouted in anger and stabbed her spear at the chest where Gorneo's fist had left a trace of injury.

"Retreat!" Gorneo shouted at her. True, one's body wouldn't hold if she didn't allow her internal Kei to recover.

Doh.....

The sound of the mask stirring came from Nina's chest.

"Where can I retreat to!" Nina shouted too and was surprised at the words.

"There's no place else to run! No other way but to cut open a path myself!"

These words gushed out from the depth of her heart. Her mood changed. Anxiety, sadness, hatred..... All negative feelings turned into fury. That was why she shouted out the words. But whose feeling was it? She didn't think it was her own. It was the Haikizoku's.

"This is the crisis. We've nowhere else to run to. We can only fight. In order to protect, we must fight."

The feeling in her heart turned into these words, and this wasn't her voice. She knew this was the voice of something inside her because she wasn't used to the feeling in the words. Haikizoku.

An image floated in her mind, an image that wasn't Zuellni but was a similar battlefield. People were chased, and the city ultimately became desolate. The Military Artists didn't wear Zuellni's fighting suits. There were adults, children, old people. A group of people that weren't united and organized. The Haikizoku had been protecting the people of this city. This was the Haikizoku's memory.

Fury filled those words, but who spoke them?

"There's no other way but to fight. No other place to retreat to. We've to keep fighting and hold out the last hope for everyone. That is what only Military Artists can do!"

The Military Artists in the city that was fated to be destroyed called to each other. And the Haikizoku saw everything. It couldn't forgive itself. It could do nothing but watch. This city was its real body. These people were its most beloved. At that hour, it could do nothing but curse itself.

And that gave birth to the Haikizoku.

"Dixerio, the man who bets on the mask for his wish to revenge, is easy to understand? That thing is necessary to him, so he lets the Haikizoku keep its appearance in the mask. What about you?"

Nelphilia's words surfaced in her head.

The Haikizoku was born in the heart of revenge. Did Dixerio begin his fight due to revenge too? Was that why he fought the Wolf Faces?

Right now, the Haikizoku wanted revenge.

What about Nina? What was inside her? She knew it wasn't possible by purely following the Haikizoku's desire for revenge, as that would take away the thing that was most important to her. To follow another's heart for revenge was the same as wiping away her personality.

She felt as if she was hit by lightning when she realized this fact.

Wasn't Layfon the same?

Karian had said before when she returned from Myath and reunited with Layfon. Layfon had followed her reason to fight. He didn't fight out of his own volition. Though she didn't know whether he was the same now, he was like that when he first arrived at Zuellni. He fought, following Nina's reason. Her evaluation of such action was that "Layfon, you're already dead". But now that she was experiencing the same situation, she finally understood him.

The same as Layfon.....

Her heart shook lightly. If this could save the city..... She swallowed the weakness in her heart. No. This wasn't enough. Her instinct reproached her. She was standing on the boundary. Once she crossed over it, she'd never return.

She recalled the event when she wore the mask of the Haikizoku. Her heart had been taken over. She was told that she was bound by promises. The promise between her and the Electronic Fairy, the promise to protect it. The promise to protect Zuellni and the nameless tiny Electronic Fairy. Her first defeat in failing to fulfill the promise in Schneibel had made her lose her life. She had always lived by promises till now. When she met Zuellni, she promised to protect her. When she met Layfon, she realized how weak she was and she promised to protect Leerin so he could fight with everything. She had to protect. This was her principle as a Military Artist.

"I..... I am me," she said as if her throat was being torn apart. "I fight for the things I am to protect. That is the real me!"

Gorneo and Shante reacted to the giants. They were keeping the giants from her, but they were close to their limit. The giant closed in one after another. Sharnid attempted to stop their movement but none of his shots were fatal.

"I'm me. That's why I fight!"

The giant swung its weapon. However, that movement was slow to Nina's eyes. She blocked the attack with the left iron whip, yet no pain and no weight pressed down on her wrist. No need to use her right hand. She bore the attack and counterattacked. The giant's body flew out. Its upper body was completely

destroyed. Nina's surroundings sank into silence. Something was happening.

"..... No, this is."

She realized a green Kei had enveloped her.

"This is the Haikizoku?"

Suddenly, she felt Nelphilia laughing somewhere. But she hadn't the time to think about that now.

Another giant appeared before her. She remembered there were numerous giants at the shelter where the students were, where Leerin was.

"Please lend me your strength!" she said. The stirring of the vein answered her. The Haikizoku's reply.

Nina jumped into the group of giants and swung with her iron whips, sending each giant flying. She felled them one by one and was shocked by that strength. She annihilated them in one swift moment. Speechless air and gazes gathered on her. The green Kei still enveloped her. This meant the battle wasn't over yet.

She must protect Leerin.

Nina jumped. Her destination was the group of giants – where Leerin was. She must fulfill her promise.

"..... What's that?" Gorneo said in the sudden silence.

A huge Kei had surrounded Nina and she destroyed the enemies in an instant. He could speculate one thing from this event.



"Is that the Haikizoku?"

When his grandfather still lived, while he was in Grendan, he had once told Gorneo about it. A Haikizoku was born from an Electronic Fairy whose city was destroyed by filth monsters. Its heart harbored intense hatred and a wish for revenge. It turned all the power used to operate a city into the heart of revenge, and that was the existence of an insane Electronic Fairy.

"Does that power really exist?"

He couldn't imagine it. One couldn't obtain that power even if one was to train till one vomited blood. It wasn't that easy to just talk about an Electronic Fairy that had undergone the destruction of a city and turned into madness. He had to take into account of its feeling of having lost thousands of people. Gorneo at least possessed that level of imagination.

However, the incredulous feeling remained in him. How big was the difference between Nina with the Haikizoku and Gorneo without the Haikizoku? All he could do was stand here and watch. He really wanted to say something.

"..... Anyway, we ought to confirm whether the Student President and the Head of Alchemy are safe. Sharnid, you here?" he said to Shante and began searching for Sharnid.

Though the Captain was gone. Though he didn't know whether she continued to fight, it was better to keep Sharnid with them.

No reply. Sharnid was also one of the best users of Sakkei in Zuellni. It wouldn't be easy for Gorneo to find him.

"He's left?"

Must have followed Nina. Sharnid was unexpectedly loyal.

"..... Shante?"

He felt something strange from her. She wasn't angry, and that was in itself an unimaginable expression on her. She looked like the spear was about to fall from her hands. She was looking at a certain place.

Gorneo tried to confirm the thing she was staring at, but he saw nothing suspicious in the area inside his vision. The rising smoke wasn't enough to

attract one's eyes. Smoke was everywhere.

"What is it?"

Shante didn't reply. A bad premonition rose in him. Had she overworked her Kei vein? This was the most reasonable explanation. She might just faint. He reached for her.

Shante jumped away faster than him. Her unexpected action prevented him from reacting quickly enough. She leaped through the forest and headed for somewhere further away.

"Shante!"

Still no reply. This wasn't the usual Shante. Gorneo didn't know what to do, and he hesitated. Karian and the Head of Alchemy were still inside the abandoned house. Zuellni couldn't lose its Heads, but Shante...

"Damn!" he shouted and followed her.

The huge shadow of Grendan was right in their path, but Gorneo pretended he didn't see it.

Epilogue

He was blocked. He had planned to ambush him but it hadn't worked. The chain had wrapped around the Shim Adamantium Dite, and at the end of the chain was a metal ball. As the huge body turned around, the chain had wrapped up the Katana like a snake.

"You're the same naive brat as before."

Those spirited eyes were less than a meter away. The breath that leaked out of the gaps in his teeth carried with it heat of Kei that caressed Layfon's face.

"I thought you had already decided, but you hesitated at the critical moment. That's why you could make such a naive attack."

Ruime pulled the chain, along with Layfon. He aimed at him with a foot. The kick sent Layfon flying to crash into a building. The impact created a large hole in the wall. Tiles fell from the rooftop. For a split second, Layfon had thought his abdomen was gone.

"You think you can do it with your body? Haha!?"

"..... I can still move," he dusted off the tiles on him and stood up among the debris. "Kei still flows and I have a weapon. These are enough to kill you."

"That's why I said you're a brat," Ruimei sighed. His sigh caused the air to rumble. Cracks advanced across the ground.

Ruimei was a difficult to understand Heaven's Blade successor like Cauntia. Once he was in battle mode, his Kei would run to its heart's content. Allowing his Kei to run rampant was his true strength. As such, the Queen wouldn't let him fight in a city. He was a man who fought as he willed, destroying everything in his surroundings in a battle.

"What'd you do after killing me? Kill off Troyatte too? Lintence as well? Then Barmelin, Tigris, Kalvan, Reverse, Cauntia? What about after killing everyone?"

You'd kill the Queen too? And all the rubbish here? And after that? Destroy Grendan as well? And after? For this brat who hasn't taken the future into consideration, how long do you plan to stay naive for?"

"What else can I do!" Layfon shouted.

Before him was a face he was used to, a face he had known since he was little. Ruimei was standing here. Layfon had never liked him, since the time he first laid eyes on him. This dislike only intensified through time. If it was Ruimei, Layfon could kill him. But he had failed. Even with the Katana's movement sealed off by the chain, he'd have liked to leave traces of injury on Ruimei. Among the Heaven's Blades, Layfon could only forgive Lintence and Reverse. He would hesitate if he had to face those two. He doubted whether he could really surpass Lintence and kill him, and he thought himself terrible to want to kill Reverse.

The kick came again. Layfon blocked it with his arms crossed. The defense was meaningless. His body flew again, and this time, the impact destroyed an entire building.

"What is it that you have to do now? Be a coward brat? Kill me? Destroy the trash gathered here? Stop being lost and think of what you should be doing!"

"Wu."

"Delbone!"

(Yes, yes.)

Delbone's bitter laughter sounded. The flake flew to Layfon's side and projected an image of Zuellni. They didn't need to tell Layfon the meaning of the red dots spread out on the map. The signs Delbone used on the map weren't just information. She had already memorized them all. They were all filth monsters.

"..... Felli."

(I've already said so.) Came Felli's faint voice. He could hear the exhaustion in her voice.

(I've told you about the filth monsters' attack, the negotiation with Grendan,

and I've followed your judgment.)

"But....."

If she could tell him in more detail.....

(Stop it, Layfon.)

Delbone cut him off.

(You acknowledge the girl's talent. In this situation, you can only rely on her to gather information. You've lost control of yourself, Layfon.)

(I.....) Felli wanted to say something, but Delbone then cut her off.

(Your thinking power's declined because of having filtered too much information. Though you have talent, you lack experience.)

Delbone's words hit him like a rod.

(But weren't you the one who didn't notice it, Layfon? Before you became a Heaven's Blade successor, you had coordinated with different Psychokinesists. You've experienced long battles. You've seen Military Artists who fainted due to overworking their Kei veins. You've seen Psychokinesists whose thinking power were reduced and could do no more. You had the experience to discover the problem, but you did not notice it. No one in this city holds more experience than you. If you don't guide them, who will? But you did not do it.)

He was scolded. Delbone was scolding him and saying the responsibility of this battle was his. That was his first time experiencing this.

"I....."

(The most important thing is to have her rest now?)

(Ah.....)

Felli's voice suddenly disappeared. Her flake lost its power and fell onto the ground beside Layfon. Layfon could do nothing but stand here. He didn't know what he should do now.

Ruimei had left for the next battlefield.

Delbone seemed to have done something to Felli. There wasn't a place in this city that her power of Psychokinesis couldn't reach.

(What have you to say next, Layfon? If it's some unsightly farewell, do you think I, in my age, will listen?)

"I..... I didn't come here to be a Military Artist....."

(But you're standing here as a Military Artist. You should already know how cruel this world is. Or are you saying Grendan isn't enough to make you understand the cruelty of the world?)

Not at all.

(I've never anticipated you to be a commander. The ideal Heaven's Blade successor is someone that doesn't need to think of anything else. But you should be able to comprehend your surroundings. You have experience that won't lose to anyone else's. If you use that experience well, the Military Artists in this city will become stronger.)

He had a lot he wanted to say. And it wasn't his desire for things to turn out like this. He didn't make himself like this. The Student President and the Head of Military Arts made the decision to have him fight. And wasn't it the captain's job to look after other Military Artists?

But he couldn't say these things. Delbone said he should help them with their lack of experience. He could have done that but he chose not to. That was why she scolded him. Since he couldn't learn anything in an Academy City as a Military Artist, he should teach others things. Wasn't this the mission of those who lived in an Academy City? What had he done? He knew already. He had taught Nina and the others the basics of Psyharder. What else? There were many who needed training, but he had pushed them aside.

(This is the consequence of your actions.)

Delbone's voice was strong and hard. But the feeling she conveyed was only that of a kind old woman giving a serious and angry expression. However, those words had a huge impact on Layfon.

(Stand up, Layfon Alseif. Because of your foolishness, there's still something you have to see.)

"What....."

(It's something important to you. That's why you've come here? The outcome of this event would hurt you more than the tragedy that's occurred in this city. But you have to face it.)

"What are you saying? Delbone!?" he shouted, his words like a threat, but they failed to reach her.

(Go and witness it, then decide what to do. If you are still the same as the present you, then you're finished.)

The flake in the shape of a butterfly flew away. Layfon stood up. His foot touched Felli's flake when he wanted to chase after it.

".....!"

He picked it up, put it in his pocket and jumped. He had never realized that Felli was the one who supported him the most in Zuellni. He wouldn't be moving now if not for her. She had fainted too when Zuellni lost control. That time, she didn't use Psychokinesis as long as she had used it now, but she had to process far more information than now. It wasn't just quantity, but types of information. She was supporting Layfon and was probably aiding Nina and the others simultaneously. And if not, she must be doing something else – because Zuellni was in a desperate crisis.

Layfon had never thought about her. Indeed, this was his fault. He didn't need her aid to return to Zuellni. Savaris was right beside him back then. He only needed to follow him from a distance that was neither close nor far. He could have let her rest for that time.....

"Damn....."

Just thinking of this was enough to make him feel down. He continued to jump, the map that Delbone had shown already etched into his brain. The place where numerous lights gathered was his destination.

The entrance of A10.

Just what was this thing Delbone had mentioned? A bad premonition stuffed his chest. He ran faster.



Troyatte was outside the crowd of giants and eliminating other giants. His speed was horrific to the average Military Artist. However, the number of giants was too great. The dots of light on Delbone's map had hardly decreased.

"What are these? So smelly and so many," Barmelin complained.

She had appeared among a group of giants. The giants moved to surround her. To the eye of a filth monster, she had probably suddenly appeared there. The giants all raised their weapons, but they died when they did so.

"Smells so foul. Go die, you revolting creatures."

She held a gun in each hand and opened a hole in the chest of the giants around her. None of the bullets hit the ball that Nina said was the giant's weakness. Even so, these giants died. Barmelin's dismal eyes could see deeper than Sharnid's. She had discovered their deep life veins in an instant and had shot accurately. Her attacks cut off the giants' lifelines in one swift moment.

Other giants trampled over their fallen comrades to encircle Barmelin with their weapons raised.

"No one's life vein can escape my eyes," she said to herself. She pulled the trigger with unbelievable speed.

The gun barrel contained only six bullets. She had used them all up. As she pulled the trigger, the gun barrel of her left gun popped out, pushing out the empty bullet shells. A part of the chains that weaved around her waist, chest, wrists and feet exploded. The separated part flew in the air and changed its shape. All the chains were Dites. Once Barmelin poured her Kei into the chains, they'd become bullets. The gun sparked and the bullets flew into the gun barrels as if sucked in by force. Barmelin made no redundant movements. Everything was done smoothly, flowing from one action to another as of a musical performance that suits any dancing stage.

She had opened large holes in the giants' chests in the process of her dance. Once she stopped dancing, a part of the chain vanished.

"So troublesome. So foul. So cold."

Feeling a chill at her own action and word, she shivered atop the corpses. She tightly hugged herself with the guns in her hands. Her gun barrels were empty. The giants seized the chance to bury her alive. But she didn't move an inch for she knew what would happen next.

A flash ran past her. Only a Heaven's Blade successor could feel it, and only a Heaven's Blade successor could evade it. But that wasn't a flash that one could evade entirely. Even Barmelin herself did not want to attempt it.

Steel Threads. Not infinite, but the number of steel threads could only be called countless. Steel threads made of a Dite. The Steel Threads moved like a hungry and thirsty wild beast seeking its preys. Once it found them, it'd hunt them down and slaughter them. The Steel Threads attacked together, dissolving its prey and piling the corpses up. The action wasn't to satisfy the beast's appetite. This could only alleviate some of its hunger. Besides, this wasn't just to satiate its hunger.

It also sought strong enemies.

The Steel Threads were here to judge whether these giants held the right qualifications. The giants stood trial with their own bodies to evaluate what qualifications they held. If they weren't suited to stand as strong enemies, then they must die. And even if they suited the criteria, they still had to die. No matter what the answer was, what awaited them was death.

One by the one, the giants lost their form and collapsed, cut into tiny pieces. No one could stop the threads.

The large black coat swayed. Green smoke floated above him. He walked in a relaxed manner, but no one could stop him. No one could get near. The zone of death expanded. No one could control this situation. Mercilessly, the Steel Threads cut down its enemies and anyone who planned to stop them into tiny pieces.

With his first step, ten giants fell. With his second step, fifty giants fell. With his third step, hundreds of giants collapsed.

The giants fell as he walked. Barmelin, Troyatte and even Ruimei could not match his speed.

When he reached Barmelin, a huge empty area had appeared.

"Is it here?" the man asked after tossing away the cigarette butt. The cigarette fell on a lump of muscle and the fire died.

"What's this? Trying to look handsome? Don't be so revolting. Go die," Barmelin scolded.

Lintence's eyebrow did not shake at the scolding. Besides, he wasn't even listening. He took a new cigarette from his coat and lit it up. Friction between steel threads caused sparks, and he used that heat to light up the cigarette.

"Have you labeled it?"

"I already made the mark."

In truth, Barmelin had with her a not-too-powerful gun to mark the shelter's door. If she had used the Heaven's Blade, she'd have opened a hole in the city.

"Make a hole with your bare hand."

"You do it. Don't make a girl do some rough task."

"Are you still a girl?"

"What a maddening guy. Just roll up your beard too, foul man, and go die. You smell like foul smoke."

"Which means you smell of foul perfume. The sewage water smells better than you," he said, mentioning and nailing her complaint about her job several days ago. Her hands shook at his reminder, but she did not raise the weapons. After that job, she had been taking flower petal baths till now.

"You should clean up your job. If you keep being so willful, you'll find yourself working in the sewer again."

"Go and die. Become a doll of your own Steel Threads and die."

Lintence's lips shivered as he listened to her curses. The ground underneath him suddenly sank. He had cut it open with the Steel Threads. Beneath him was the entrance to the shelter. He landed and walked into the deeper part of the underground shelter.

"How revolting!"

Barmelin's body shook when she couldn't see Lintence anymore. She was laughing. That stiff man with a face of a dead fish actually laughed. Nothing was more revolting than that.

Lintence continued to head deeper into the shelter. He cut apart all the defensive doors and walls before him with the Steel Threads. He didn't feel anyone's presence. This area must have been abandoned. He could tell from the surrounding that the students had made a quick decision and then evacuated in an orderly manner. These people had brains enough to carry out such a task. His evaluation of the students rose a little bit as a result. Lintence's birth-city was too peaceful. So peaceful that they couldn't even evacuate in an organized manner. But for the students in this city, the ability to carry out such a mass evacuation was probably a tragedy.

After walking a while, he saw her.

"Lintence-san?" Layfon's childhood friend looked at him with shock.

No one else was here beside her. Why was she here? Lintence found that surprising, as if she had stayed behind, knowing he was coming to pick her up.

"You knew?"

"Why are you here?"

The two asked their question at the same time, then fell into silence.

"I'm here to pick you up."

The change in her expression did not escape his eyes.

"What is it?" he said without thinking.

"Huh? Nothing," she shook her head lightly. Her expression was complicated. Suspicion and a feeling of exhaustion.

"Is Grendan here?"

"Yes," he nodded.

Her shoulders rose as she sighed. "I feel like a fool. I rode the roaming bus here and had an uncomfortable experience."

"That is what journeying is like. Most of them end without any meaning. No matter where it is, people keep on living. That truth won't change," he said.

People searched for a safe place to live in. Cities searched for safe places to keep their people alive. That was why a city would move and drift. Only Grendan was different and unusual. Roaming buses came into existence due to moving cities. But sometimes, a roaming bus would take a long route even though two cities were close. Lintence had come across two cities at war on his journey, meeting once again a city he had traveled to before. This thing happened frequently. Even though he wanted to travel to another city, he'd end up arriving at a city in his previous itinerary, stopping him from moving ahead. Leerin looked at him. He guessed she didn't know what to say. He took a deep drag of the cigarette.

"If you have nothing to take with you, I can lead you out now. Got anything?"

Leerin thought for a moment and shook her head. Though she wanted to talk to Layfon again, she abandoned that thought.

Though Lintence felt a feeling of familiarity and regret, he did not care for that. It meant nothing to him. War would take place. All he needed was to follow the Queen to satisfy himself. That explained his acceptance of this job regardless of the little significance it held.

"Let's go."

"Right," she nodded.

Lintence turned around to retrace his steps, and stopped.

"As I thought, you can't!" someone shouted and Leerin found herself being hugged. The sound of wailing came behind her back.

"Wh, wh, what....." she immediately knew who it was.

Lintence breathed out green smoke to replace his sigh and turned around once more.

"What did I come here for?"

"I've thought of it. I've been thinking since then, and then I understood. I understood a very important fact."

Leerin fell under the embrace. A tall woman held her tightly with both of her arms. She had buried her head in Leerin's chest and was rubbing her head against her like a cute little animal. It was Alsheyra.

"What is it?"

"If this continued, you'd carry my Leerin like a princess. Do you think I'd forgive you for such a shocking thing!? Such a thing?"

"....."

"Even if I allow you to touch my Leerin's back and shoulder with your perverted hand, but..... But if you touch her butt, and caress her, and you took her home without letting me know. Once I thought of that, I, I, I!"

"Who knew of such things," he said, not wanting to converse with such an unreasonable person.

"Wh, wh, what....." Leerin opened and closed her mouth, looking at Synola and too shocked to say anything.

"Sy, Sy.... Synola-senpai? Why are you here?"

"I came to save you."

To hear that seriousness from the person in front of her, even Barmelin would shiver.

"You must be frightened? But we don't have anyone else who suits this mission. But never mind. We can return to Grendan."

"Ha, Ha....."

Alsheyra..... Leerin called her Synola. Synola was the Queen's fake identity when she lived outside the palace. Though she was the Queen, her time spent working as a Queen was probably less than one tenth of the Queen's working hours. Lintence never thought it worthwhile to listen to her, so he had always filtered her words out. As such, he never remembered her fake name.

"But speaking of which, why..... No. How did you get here?" Leerin finally shook loose Alsheyra's hands and stood up.

Alsheyra's expression turned serious, whereas Leerin's face turned white.

Lintence was familiar with Alsheyra's personality. Though that was in itself a tragic thing, he did not sympathize with Leerin's feeling. He meant the wasted effort she made to journey to Zuellni.

"Actually, I'm hiding something from you."

"Oh, I see."

"Actually, I'm the Queen!" she placed a hand on her own chest and looked apologetic.

"Really....." But Leerin's answer was cold.

"You don't believe me?"

"No, I see. That's why Lintence-san..... followed me like a guard."

"You noticed?"

"No, but I felt what you do is possible. That's the kind of feeling I have."

Leerin had let her down mercilessly. Alsheyra had expected a bigger reaction from her. A more confused, then more shocked expression. A normal person would not have believed her words, but the person who had with her Heaven's Blade successors would not have lied. At least, that kind of person would not have appeared in Grendan. Leerin wasn't suspicious of her at all. Only that her reaction had betrayed Alsheyra's expectation.

"Humph. Humph....." Lintence's throat stirred. Though he wanted to control himself, his mouth opened on its own and he failed to suppress what came out.

"Don't laugh," Alsheyra glared at him but failed to stop his laughter.

"Whatever, let's hurry up and leave. It's about time for the red faced monkey to arrive," Lintence laughed as he said. Alsheyra looked down.

"A monkey's face is originally red, along with its butt too."

Leerin walked after Lintence with suspicion, not sure what they were implying. Though Alsheyra was determined to carry her, she had refused. They walked through the broken defensive walls and front door to arrive outside the shelter.

"That's too high for Leerin."

Originally, part of the road would descend to form a slope. But Lintence had cut a hole with his Steel Threads, the gap between the ground they stood on and the ground of Zuellni was two times a person's height.

They didn't hear any more sound of fighting. They heard Barmelin, Troyatte and Ruimei talking above. They had almost finished killing off the giants. Otherwise, those three would be too impotent.

"You can shake Lintence loose now." Alsheyra's voice was like a spoiled cat. Leerin planned to ignore her.

"You're a girl, Leerin, you must be careful! This guy is boring and super-sloppy. Look at his hair. If you give it a flick, fleas would jump out."

"No way, you're joking," Leerin said.

"And he doesn't wash his clothes daily."

"Ah, that's possible."

"Right? So let me do it."

"But I'm afraid to let the Queen carry me....."

"Don't be. I won't make you feel frightened."

"But....."

"That guy's a guard, a bodyguard! I can't restrict his arms from moving!"

"It matters not whether the person here has free hands or not," Lintence said.

"Shut up!" Alsheyra glared at him with a reddened face. Since her expression was like this, it'd be useless for Leerin to say anything more.

"Uh, I can't win against you," Leerin sighed and accepted her suggestion. Alsheyra clapped her hands happily without the air of a Queen.

..... But the "air of a Queen" probably never existed in her in the first place. Leerin accepted this without much feeling. Though she thought she shouldn't be bothered about this, she still wanted to think more on it.

Before that happened, the monkey had arrived.

"Ah!" Leerin burst out.

Light covered one side of Lintence, but the impact was nonexistent. Lintence's Steel Threads had blocked the attack.

"Let Leerin go!" Layfon shouted. He stood in midair, looking down at them. His Katana looked to have stopped in the air. The Steel Threads had cancelled the Kei impact of the Katana.

Lintence lit up a new cigarette. His speed and power made Layfon swallow his words.

"So naive. Did they not tell you already?" he said faintly to the young man that he had taught the Steel Threads technique. Layfon gritted his teeth. He looked at the person who was carrying Leerin and his expression froze.

"Your Majesty....."

"Hi, young man," Alsheyra greeted him with a smile. Despair fell on him.

"I'm sorry, but I have to take Leerin with me."

"What joke is this!"

"Leerin only came out to travel. Isn't it natural for her to return to Grendan?"

"Don't just make your own..."

"Which side is making its own assumption?" Alsheyra said.

Layfon looked at Leerin. "Leerin, come here!"

"Layfon....." She ignored his gaze.

"Leerin!"

"This is the Queen's order. I can't disobey her," she said in a tiny voice.

"Leerin!"

"I!..... I want to return to Grendan. One day, I'd return, and that just happens to be today. That's how things are. Layfon, you can think like that."

He landed, suddenly losing his momentum, but he still held the Katana ready.

Lintence noticed the weapon in Layfon's hand. It was a Katana.

"..... What did you do to her?" Layfon said.

"What manner you have. What do you think I'd do to her? Either way, she's my cute junior in Grendan."

Layfon's expression didn't sway. He understood the Queen's personality. It wouldn't be strange that she might actually be Leerin's senior. And this was the truth. Why did he ask such a meaningless question? He should already have known.

"Leerin said she wants to go back. Layfon, can you move aside?"

"....."

He didn't reply, but he felt regret. His expression held both regret and stubbornness for Leerin. His gaze sought hers, but she kept moving her gaze away. She did not ask for his help.

A teacher-student relationship did not exist between Lintence and Layfon. The feeling was probably negative even if it existed.

Layfon could do nothing. He did not have a Heaven's Blade and he was wounded. Though his Kei flowed, he could not use his full strength. He had no chance of winning against Lintence and the Queen.

"Layfon, please," Leerin pleaded.

He shrank. The tension vanished. Lintence could tell from his Kei.

"Then see you again. I think you can keep living a normal life."

Alsheyra's words were expected, meaningless.

Had Layfon gone rusty? Lintence thought. He had thought so from the time of Layfon's exile. Lintence hated his own skill getting rusty. That was why he left his home city. Layfon, on the other hand, left his home city to become rusty. That was the difference between them. After today, Layfon would return to his original path. To Lintence, this was a shame. But he had no urge to pick him up. A guy who couldn't stand by his power was useless.

Keep moving. The field behind him was empty of people. Nothing obstructed the road to Grendan. Nothing. Not filth monsters. Not Military Artists.

The presence moved with tremendous speed. He stood up, his Kei flowing through his entire body. When Lintence felt it, the Steel Threads moved

simultaneously. The blade flitted through the steel threads to close in on Alsheyra.

But Alsheyra did not turn around.

The Steel Threads had blocked that attack. The light of Kei exploded.

"I thought you'd given up."

"Stop joking."

On the other side of the Steel Threads was Layfon's serious face.

"Layfon!" Leerin called over the Queen's shoulder. "Please."

"No!"

Leerin's expression changed at that emotional and irrational reply. Lintence caught her expression and went to stand before Layfon.

"This is so unsightly. It makes it so hard to tolerate that I want to see you suffer some."

"Unsightly? What's that? What did I do wrong? If this continues, I can do nothing. Isn't that what "unsightly" is? No, never mind. No matter how unsightly I am, I....." he sought Leerin's gaze and wanted to know what she thought. What expression did she hold now?

"No matter what it is, as long as it belongs to Grendan, it's got nothing to do with you anymore," Lintence said. He knew his words meant nothing. Rationality could not contain one's emotions. If only rationality was enough, he himself wouldn't have worried about his skill becoming rusty. He'd have died protecting his home city.

"....."

As he had expected, Layfon's eyes contained nothing but fury.

"Is that so. In that case."

It was useless to say anything to Layfon now. He felt he was naive to still want to persuade him.

"I can only stop you with force."

The naivety melted in Lintence's words as he moved. Though he didn't look to have moved, he did move. The Steel Threads rolled up as Layfon's Katana gave off light.

The two clashed.

Alsheyra looked at the Leerin in her arms and saw her complicated expression.

"Are you bothered?"

"Huh?"

The sound of commotion was behind them. The noise of the commotion didn't just include the Kei light to normal people, but this level of noise was just a small ruckus to Alsheyra. Lintence's Steel Threads were blocking off even the remnants of the battle, so Leerin was unhurt. Alsheyra would never allow anything to harm her.

"I was a little surprised. I didn't think you'd say to return so quickly."

The battle behind her was just extra entertainment to Alsheyra. But not so with Leerin. Never mind Lintence, who was standing and not moving an inch. But Leerin's eyes weren't enough to catch up with Layfon's movement. Moreover, this wasn't the time to use her closed right eye.

"..... Because I feel I have to return."

She was bothered by the battle but she couldn't see it clearly. Dissatisfaction filled her, and she balled her hands into tight fists. Alsheyra watched her and waited for her to speak.

"She's in Grendan, isn't she? Saya."

Her words landed a heavy blow on Alsheyra's chest. These words finally left Leerin's mouth. No, Alsheyra already knew this day would come, but if possible, she wished for this day to never arrive. However, things weren't always that pretty.

"Yes," she nodded. "She's sleeping in a secret place, somewhere deep inside Grendan. No one, not even me, can enter that place. She's been waiting there."

Who was it? What was it? Alsheyra only knew of battles, and that an

awareness wanted to destroy this world.

"When did it begin?"

"A long..... Long time ago. At the time of the birth of this world."

"It feels like a long story."

Leerin turned her attention back to the battle. Even though she couldn't catch up with it, she still couldn't move her eyes away.

"Layfon..... It's okay not to involve him in this, right? Because he's no longer part of Grendan."

This was one reason why Leerin wished to return quickly.

"Probably."

Yes. Not only as a citizen of Grendan. This event had nothing to do with people who weren't Heaven's Blade successors. Alsheyra was searching for Military Artists who couldn't exercise all of their strength without a Heaven's Blade. Layfon suited this criterion. Though physically, his athletic ability and technique were comparatively lower than other Heaven's Blade successors, his ability in Kei, whether it be emitting Kei or speed of restoring and sustaining Kei, was top among the Heaven's Blades. At one time, Alsheyra had done an investigation on his body with the lie of having him undergo a body health check, and the report had showed Layfon's Kei vein had experienced signs of expansion at a younger age. In addition, he had great concentration to control his enormous Kei. But what about now? Since Lintence called him "naive", perhaps Layfon had yet to perfect his control of Kei?

(Haha, perhaps.)

Perhaps Lintence wanted to test that hypothesis. He looked like he was playing. Usually, he wouldn't be like this. So Lintence.....

She looked at Leerin again, who was watching the battle with anxiety.

He had no place to escape to. Layfon attempted to wipe clean the pressure on him with the Shim Adamantium Dite. The Steel Threads surrounding him evaded his cut path like spiderweb in the wind. But even if he shot his Kei

directly at Lintence, the Heaven's Blade successor would have blocked the attack with complicated patterns of the Steel Threads that made up the strong defensive formation.

Lintence hadn't moved from his spot. He continued to smoke, sometimes taking a drag and the tip of the cigarette turned red. He then puffed out a thread of green smoke. All he did was simply smoke. Even so, the Steel Threads attacks did not stop. Since swinging the Katana was not enough to evade all the Steel Threads, Layfon kept moving. He had no other way but to escape.

(What should I do?)

He kept fighting..... Perhaps this wasn't even a battle. He thought with all his wits. If he had the Sapphire Dite..... He denied that thought. Lintence would turn the battle to his advantage in one split moment if Layfon was to use the Steel Threads. Rather than using a technique in front of its expert, it was better to fight with one Katana.

Layfon had watched Lintence fight using the Steel Threads from a close distance. However, this was his first time fighting him head to head. Lintence was an unbelievable opponent. He felt he couldn't have done much even if he had the Heaven's Blade. It was obvious that Lintence hadn't been fighting seriously. Still, Layfon failed to make an effective move.

(What should I do? What should I do?)

No matter how hard he pondered, he couldn't find a way to escape the net of Steel Threads.

"What? Can't do anything?" Lintence asked as he stepped on the cigarette butt on the ground. "This is a waste of time. I have no need to keep playing with you."

Tension swept through Layfon's entire body. He shivered at the attack that was to come. At the same time, he had a premonition that Leerin would turn farther away from him.

He rushed forward, but the Steel Threads interfered. He raised the Shim Adamantium Dite and attempted to cut down the Threads with the dark blade. The Threads evaded him and swept back to assault him. He avoided them and

kept moving forward. Evade and move. Every time, he evaded the Steel Threads and slipped by them with inches between them and his skin. But once he evaded the attack, the Kei between the Steel Threads would head for him. He covered his entire body with Kei to fight against Lintence's Kei. Still, this had wounded him, and in a short period of time, traces of injuries had surfaced on his body, bringing him pain.

Regardless, Layfon kept striding forward. Even one step was better than none. And it was true that he was closing in on Lintence one step at a time.

"....."

Lintence saw everything that Layfon did. He took out a new cigarette from his coat pocket.

"All right, this the last cigarette. You have 180 seconds till I finish it."

He held the cigarette between his teeth. He just needed to watch to know how much time was left.

Layfon kept moving, anxiety burning his heart. As a result, he failed to evade the Steel Threads completely, and a Steel Thread cut away some of his muscle on his shoulder. Blood shot forth painfully. Caring nothing for the wound, he moved forward. He swung the Katana and stepped out. Using the smallest movement, he checked his surroundings with his eyes. He observed the Steel Threads that were weaved together to attack him. He blocked and chased them away with his weapon and moved forward. Swing the Katana, evade and move forward.

But the distance he had gained was so little that it wasn't worth mentioning. He kept his position with the will to die while forcing himself to take the next step. He was wasting time, and this thought made him more impatient. He couldn't make it. 180 seconds? How much time had passed? How much time was left? What about the cigarette.....? He had no time to look at Lintence. The Steel Threads waited for his weakness to show. Lintence was still playing. If Layfon lost his concentration, he'd die. He'd definitely die. It was useless to keep guys alive who couldn't avoid the Steel Threads. Much better to just kill them off. That was what Lintence was like. The biggest number of Steel Threads was about 100 million. How many Steel Threads were here? 200? 300.....

Just that many? How much of Lintence's strength was he showing? How much out of 100 percent? Perhaps this was meaningless. But the distance between Lintence and Layfon did have some meaning. If Lintence had wanted to kill him, he just needed to increase the number of Steel Threads by 300. Hadn't Layfon's existence proven that truth?

Layfon's feelings turned turgid. Lintence was so far from him, and Alsheyra, who was behind the Heaven's Blade successor, was even further away. How big a distance was it to want to reach Leerin who was in the Queen's arms? His body moved. His Katana danced. He held his weapon closely. But his movements were getting clumsy. Pain bit his entire body. His evasive actions were less perfect. He could no longer capture the movements of the Steel Threads with just his eyes. He had to use all of his senses. However, his body became heavier and his senses were turning dull. He had fought the filth monster in its aged phase, Savaris, and now Lintence. He had been fighting till now, and his body was reaching its limit.

Kei. He had to let more Kei flow. Even though the Dite couldn't bear more Kei, he just needed more for his body. Let his Internal Kei run more intensely. Wake up his body and enliven his entire nervous system. It was still too early to sleep and give up.

Run. Run. Run!

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

He roared. His hot Kei vein felt like it was burning. Perhaps it would really burn. But it was all right. If he could keep burning till he used it all up, then keep on burning!

Light sparked in his vision. No. His body was exuding the light. The redundant Kei that his body had failed to absorb was leaking from him and was automatically turning into External Burst type Kei. This Kei pushed back the Steel Threads and shook apart the ground beneath his feet. The air roared and keened. His body hurt as if he was bathing in an explosion. But that was all right. Layfon jumped and sped past the Steel Threads, past Lintence to reach the Queen. Otherwise, he would fail to catch Leerin's hand.

One swift moment was where the only chance laid. He went past Lintence to

the Queen. He spied the big coat in the corner of his eye. The Queen's dark hair was getting closer. He could get closer to her as long as his Kei kept running, as if it had no limit, as if it was to burn itself out. The blade in his hand turned into a muddier color of red. A muddier red of blood. He had not poured more Kei into the Dite, but the redundant Kei on the Dite was beyond what it could bear.

One strike. Only one strike was all he had. One strike. This was a fight with the Queen. No second strike was allowed.

His gaze met Leerin's. But she surely wouldn't understand the changes here. He didn't think she was looking at him, so he looked at her. Those pupils that were slightly slow and numb. Layfon stared at those pupils as if he was sucked into them. He must take back that wish and make it come true. But just whom was that wish for?

Confused, doubtful, yet he had no time to give them an answer. It was too harsh to give an answer in one moment. He swung down the Shim Adamantium Dite. The scarlet cut path ran out from him to close with the Queen's neck. Cut down the Queen's neck, kill her and take back Leerin. This was what went through his mind.....

But that did not happen.

The result came to him first from the feeling on his wrist rather than from his vision. The swing was too hollow, too relaxing. The blade extended from his hand had disappeared. Not that it had exploded from overloading. The blade had scattered before Layfon's very eyes into countless pieces. The Steel Threads had cut it down.

Layfon leaped over the Queen and landed. The momentum made him slide out. Though he had strengthened himself with Internal Kei, he had failed to control the momentum and rein it in. He slid and slid. He couldn't even ready his stance to fight. He knew the Steel Threads would not let this chance go. And his opponent would not let this chance slip by. Pressure immediately came to Layfon's chest. The Steel Threads were gathering here.

Sougenkyoku Hane Mushi.

Originally, it was a move to invade the filth monster's body and strike it from its inside.

Layfon abandoned the plan to keep sliding, and instead, used its force to jump back. The Steel Threads dispersed in the dance of a mad storm. Pain battered his entire body, but he had successfully escaped from the fatal attack. But blood was bleeding from his internal organs. His forehead was injured, and his vision had turned red. The Steel Threads had cut deep into his limbs. Though he had jumped out before the Steel Threads revealed all their fangs and had gotten rid of the Steel Threads from his body, the Kei in the weapon had struck deep inside Layfon, rendering him immobile.

He wanted to stand up, but failed. The lack of weight that should be the Dite in his hand saddened him. Kei still cycled in his body, but the wounds on his body could not recover immediately. Still, he'd lose if he did not stand up. At least, he did not want to lose. If he gave up now.....

"180 seconds are up," Lintence said and stepped on the cigarette.

All of a sudden, Layfon was paralysed. He hadn't noticed that sometime, a Steel Thread had slipped past his sense and sight to invade him. The Kei from the thread cut down his consciousness. He knew his opponent wasn't serious. Even so, Lintence held in his palm Layfon's life and death.

He lost his consciousness, not knowing what was going on.

He seemed to see something in a split second, a figure that looked like Nina, enveloped by blue light.

"Layfon!" she shouted, seeing Layfon topple. What an unbelievable sight. That Layfon was defeated. Was this real? But Layfon had fallen. A man and a woman stood before him, and was it Leerin who was in that woman's arms?

"Who are you?"

Though she wanted to check on Layfon, she didn't think she had the strength left to do so. She just looked intently at the man and woman.

The woman's elegant face revealed a knowing smile.

"Lin, that's a Haikizoku."

"I know. I've seen it before."

"Heh~ Just as expected from someone with traveling experience. You really are different."

Nina felt cold on her back as she listened to the conversation. They had seen through her.

"Who are you?"

"Grendan's big boss and her servant," the woman said with a joking attitude.

"No, Nina. Hurry and run away!" Leerin shouted. "They're the Queen and a Heaven's Blade successor. They're too much for you. Run!"

Nina's eyes widened. This woman was the Queen, someone strong enough to control the Heaven's Blade successors like Layfon. And this man was like the former Layfon. He was a Heaven's Blade successor.

"..... What are you planning to do with Leerin?"

"We're protecting our precious citizen. Is that wrong?"

The woman's aura was still as strong. In her voice was someone who liked to joke. She didn't act like a city's conqueror.

"Though it's a bit embarrassing, I'd be thankful if you were to come with us. What do you think? Besides, I think I can show you what you want to see."

"What are you.....?"

"This world. The Haikizoku. The Electronic Fairy. The mystery that contains them all. You're already involved. Are you not bothered?"

"These things....."

The Queen moved her gaze from Nina. Nina chased after her without giving it a thought. Did the other person notice something? Or had she just simply looked away?

There. Over there.

He was a far distance away from them, but they could still see him clearly. A person stood at the contact point between Grendan and Zuellni.

"Dixerio..... Senpai?"

That must be him. But somehow, he felt different from usual. He was letting down a huge metal whip. Kei with a color different from Nina's spilled out of Dixerio. The mask on his face was also different. It looked the same as the Wolf Face's mask, but it felt different. Nina also felt that she had seen it somewhere before.

"Ah, we're seen," the Queen said. "This way, we can't run away."

Nina didn't feel the Queen was talking to him. She was speaking to herself.

"What is it? You want to run away?"

"Humans always want to escape from things that are already set. That's what youth is like."

"You're speaking of youth at your age?"

"..... If you keep saying more, I'd hit you."

Dixerio turned around and stepped into Grendan as if he had noticed Nina.

"Though the city has a few factors, let this side accept them all."

"Huh?" Nina responded. It seemed the other side was talking to her.

"How's it? Not interested?"

"Isn't the Haikizoku your aim?"

"Yeah..... The previous King was the one who sent out the Mercenary Gang. Savaris left Grendan because he couldn't stand Kanaris' nagging. In truth, I think it's a tiny bit better to have the Haikizoku than without it. Though it might be useful for Grendan, but this time, the authority of obtaining the Haikizoku or not rests with Saya....."

Nina didn't understand what she just said. This woman's lack of tension had influenced her.

"Well, you'd understand once you reach that side. Interested? If not, never mind. But if you want to interfere with us, I can only defeat you," Alsheyra said in a relaxed manner.

Nina thought for a moment. Layfon had fallen. Leerin was in their hands. Could she win just by herself? How serious was the Queen?

Nina's gaze met Leerin. She felt that gaze was telling her not to get closer. But was it all right for her to return to Grendan like that? Nina thought of the Layfon behind her. Could she win with the power of the Haikizoku against opponents that Layfon had failed to defeat?

No.....

"Aah, that's a waste of effort," the Queen laughed, having seen through Nina's plan.

Nina tightened her grip on the iron whips as she shivered at the Queen's action.

"It's not my style to get confused over whether I can win or not."

"Oh~"

"I've promised Layfon to protect Leerin. If I were to break the promise, you might as well kill me here!"

Leerin moaned, wanting to stop Nina but Nina didn't hear her shout.

"That's quite some preparation."

The man next to the Queen walked up to her.

"Lin, you can't kill her."

"Then can this stop that woman?"

The voice of the man named Lin echoed in the dim atmosphere.

"Please stop! Lintence-san!" Leerin shouted. The name of this man, Lintence, made Nina's back feel more icy.

Lintence. The man who taught Layfon the Steel Threads technique.

"Real strength can be utilized best in a deep crisis. What's the most horrifying is an action that bets on one's life. Layfon's for example, is only child's play."

Pressure assaulted Nina's entire body. But she wasn't scared at all. She waited for a chance to attack as she suppressed the shivering of her back.

The timing came from the outside. A sound of gunshot writhed around the condensed Kei bullet that ran straight here. It was a shot at the Queen from a

building far away.

But another gunshot had stopped it. The paths of two bullets overlapped and the explosion of Kei created a small circle in the air. Another bullet had stopped this bullet and Nina could tell immediately where the first bullet came from. However, she could only tell the originator of the second bullet from the traces of Kei left after the Kei explosion.

Sharnid had shot the first bullet. Who shot the next one?

No time to confirm that. Nina moved. Lintence's gaze was still on the Kei of the explosion.

But that was a trap.

"..... Layfon is a troublesome brat," Lintence said and Nina, while running forward, felt a strange feeling from her feet. It was already too late when she felt it. Something had trapped her feet and she fell onto the ground. Steel threads then wrapped around her wrists also. Their speed far exceeded Nina's and it had sealed off all her movements.

"But he knows the timing of a fight. If he were to realize the feeling of being in a deep crisis, he'd become an even more incredible monster as long as he could surpass the line he's drawn. You seem to have easily crossed that line. If we're to predict the future of having experienced millions of battles, either you or Layfon, you're still lacking..... brats."

Nina lost her consciousness in the next second.

Sharnid saw it happen.

He saw everything.

He could do nothing but watch. He couldn't press the trigger of his sniper rifle. A pressure came through his forehead where a gun was. A woman wearing unique clothes was holding it to his forehead.

"Damn brat. Wanna die?"

"..... I've never thought of wanting to die."

Sharnid let go of the sniper rifle and raised his hands. He had no choice but to

surrender. The gap between him and this woman was overwhelming. Not only did her bullet stop his, he also didn't notice her closing in on him. He only lived because she didn't kill him off.

The woman disappeared the moment the gun was lifted from his forehead but Sharnid remained immobile.

He could only watch them take the unconscious Nina away.

He wore a new fighting suit. But this action spread the pain of the wound hiding underneath the bandage.

He had lost completely. Nothing else existed besides this truth. It mattered not that he was alive. The important point was that he had lost. The end result was Leerin had been taken away. Nina was also taken too. Hadn't the Haikizoku already left her? What had happened in Zuellni while Layfon was away?

His body had been unable to move and he had lost his consciousness. Something had happened during this time and Nina had been taken to Grendan. Defeat pained him more than the wounds he bore. He understood what he wanted to do was very foolish even without having to tell anyone about it. All he could do was lie on the ground, defeated by his opponent. What else could someone like him do? He felt he couldn't do anything.

Had he been too arrogant because he was a former Heaven's Blade successor? Though he hadn't thought of it that way, the result might have shown otherwise.

But a real Heaven's Blade successor had shown up and defeated him. This was unsightly.

Layfon left the Changing Room.

Harley was waiting for him in the corridor.

"You're quick."

"Felli had already contacted me before you returned."

Harley forced out a smile and passed over the weapon harness with Dites in it. The Adamantium Dite, Shim Adamantium Dite and the Sapphire Dite.

Layfon's weapons. The weapons he used in Zuellni. The Dites combined with Harley and Kirik's talents and skills were still far from a Heaven's Blade. The wall blocking Layfon was this huge and it wasn't the only obstacle.

Could he overcome all of them?

"And this."

Harley took out the Iron Dite. The Dite that Leerin brought from Grendan.

"To be honest, I don't recommend this Dite judging by the largest amount of Kei you could bring out but....." he stopped halfway. Layfon felt regret in his words. Harley was bitter about making the Shim Adamantium Dite yet it still wasn't enough to sustain Layfon's Kei.

"Thank you."

He took the Iron Dite and placed it in the slot deliberately left empty in the weapon harness.

"Nina, she'll return?" Harley said as Layfon took a step out.

"Definitely."

That was what he wanted to say but he failed to give voice to it. All he did was walk wordlessly in the corridor.

He knew he should have given Harley a reply.

Layfon arrived above the ground of Zuellni.

Activities to revitalize the city had begun. The destruction above ground was incredible. Many students had lost their dormitories. These students were arranged to stay at the dormitories prepared for the first years. Even so, the leftover students had no choice but to live in the shelters.

Noise sounded from working machines but it didn't feel uncomfortable to his ears. Though the students didn't look happy, they didn't look down either. It was probably already a big encouragement for them to be able to keep on living.

Layfon couldn't join them.

Military Artists remained on alert in case any filth monsters were still around.

No one found it strange for Layfon to walk about, dressed in fighting clothes.

He didn't ask how badly the Military Artists were injured. He had received treatment in the clinic located in the shelter, slept for a day like mud, climbed up from bed and walked over here. He didn't have the time to ask for information. But he didn't think he could do a thing even if he had heard the news.

Leerin was taken away. Nina was also taken away.

He was here, unable to do a thing. He had also failed to defeat the aged phase filth monster. The Queen was the one who defeated it. He should have known about Felli overworking herself. The giant filth monsters were attacking the city, yet Layfon was fighting the Heaven's Blade successors who were hunting them down.

He felt like he was walking while wearing unsightly-looking clothes.

Layfon walked as he watched the city, indifferent. Some people stood looking at the destroyed buildings. Some girls were smiling, chatting about getting new furniture. Simple tents lined the road. Cooking smoke issued from them.

He could hear the sound of people working everywhere.

This place was full of vitality. The people here did not yield to the misfortune even though the place they lived in was turned upside down. The sense of welcoming a happier future life was intensifying.

Perhaps because this was an Academy City. One just needed to rebuild even if it was broken. The existence behind this city was to do what was realistic and practical. The students weren't alone. The vitality exuding from their collective bodies depicted the city's new chapter.

Layfon couldn't join them.

Something inside him was broken. The feeling of returning to the path of a Military Artist. The feeling that the people he knew in Grendan had shattered. He didn't feel at ease even with the weapon harness hanging from his wrist. The fighting clothes were the same, giving off a feeling of something different. Even he himself didn't think he acknowledged the current him.

Still, Layfon kept walking.

And at last came to the outskirts of the city.

Grendan stood before him. The two cities didn't seem to be on alert against each other. Layfon didn't sense anyone monitoring him. But trade and communication were banned between the two. A fence blocking off entry stood here.

Zuellni still had one broken leg. It seemed to be waiting for it to re-grow. But Layfon couldn't fathom the reason as to why Grendan wasn't moving.

He would be inside Grendan if he were to cross over this line. But could he reach his goal even if he reached that place? The wall blocking him was so high he couldn't see its top, and that wasn't the only wall. He couldn't surpass the wall that was Lintence. Leerin had been taken away. So simple. And Nina too. Grendan and the Queen had taken away those two. Why did Leerin go with the Queen? Layfon didn't understand. He didn't get anything yet he still acted. However, the doubt asking what he himself could do had then stopped his footsteps.

Just what could he do?

"You've really come."

Layfon turned around at that voice.

It was Sharnid. Felli was here too. Both of them wore fighting clothes like him.

"Why?"

"Aren't we thinking the same thing?" Sharnid's expression was still the same as he walked up to him.

"The Captain's been taken. There's no insult bigger than that."

He patted Layfon's shoulder, bringing his face close to him. He was smiling but his eyes weren't.

"Felli... senpai."

"My exhaustion is gone. The lack of judgment won't happen again."

The resolve in her calm attitude was firm.

"Can't accept failure just like this."

"Oh, Felli-chan has said something excellent."

"But....."

Lost. Layfon had lost. And numerous strong fighters existed in that city. Besides, it was the country. The Queen had taken Nina. This meant this was Grendan's will. If they were to resist it, they would be declaring war against this country. A fight more intense than days ago would take place beyond this contact point.

"I also think I'll regret not doing something."

A few pats on Layfon's shoulder.

"Though I'll also regret doing it. But I don't know which side is right. And I might not be able to accept it even if it's right. No matter whether I do it or not, either side can be right. That's how it'd look from the result? It's better for me to do it. That's why I'm here."

Felli walked up to the edge.

"Felli..... senpai, that's really dangerous."

He received a wordless kick on his leg.

"Ouch!"

Even he himself was surprised at the sound of pain he uttered. He sat down on the ground. Felli's icy gaze hit him.

"Just how long do you plan to whine? You've already come this far."

"Sen, senpai."

"How about letting me see your manly side sometimes? Over there. The man always considering what to say to make himself look handsome. You'd do well to have one percent of him. Can't you show something like that to me?"

"Wa, still as deadly as always. So harsh....."

Sharnid laughed.

Felli turned around.

Layfon was speechless for a while then his lips softened. There was no room for negotiation. He felt a more tragic end awaited him if he kept speaking out.

"True."

He felt as if his confusion had been flushed away. He looked at Grendan once more.



"Let us save the Captain."

And Leerin too.

Layfon and the two passed over the contact point.